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Chinese

A Comprehensive Grammar

Yip Po-Ching and Don Rimmington



Chinese

A Comprehensive Grammar

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- Morphology and Syntax (I), which looks at Chinese word formation
- Morphology and Syntax (II), which explores the interaction between words, expressions and sentences
- Intralingual Transpositions, which reviews the possible conversions between possible sentential constructions
- Interlingual Conversions, which examines the differences between Chinese and English

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A Comprehensive Grammar

Second edition



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Don Rimmington**

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Any errors are, of course, entirely the responsibility of the authors.

Yip Po-Ching and Don Rimmington
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Abbreviations

adj.	adjective
cl.	clause
class.	classical
colloq.	colloquial
cv	coverb
dial.	dialect
dv	dummy verb
fml.	formal
infml.	informal
lit.	literally
mv	modal verb
mw	measure word
n.	noun
neut.	neutral
num.	numeral
obs.	obsolete
p.	predicate
pron.	pronoun
s.	subject
svo	subject-verb-object
vb.	verb
vs.	versus

Preface to the second edition

The writing of this second edition of *Chinese: A Comprehensive Grammar* has given us the opportunity not only to amend errors in *pinyin* notations but also to introduce a number of new findings.

Following the comments of reviewers, we have rewritten the chapter on Prosody and Syntax and have added four new chapters: Morphology and Syntax I and II, Intralingual Transpositions, and Interlingual Conversions.

In the revised chapter on Prosodic Features of Chinese, we have looked further into this area of grammar, and we hope that we have been able to provide a more developed analysis of the interaction between prosody and syntax in the language.

We have introduced the chapter on Morphology and Syntax (I) in an attempt to make the grammar comprehensive in the sense that it covers Chinese word-formation rules, which are essentially related to syntactic detail.

In Morphology and Syntax (II), which naturally follows from this, we offer a close analysis of the interaction between microsyntax-based lexical constructions (i.e. words, expressions or idioms) and macrosyntactic constructions (i.e. phrases and sentences).

Intralingual Transpositions samples plausible conversions between different sentential constructions within the language. Finally, Interlingual Conversions focuses on the essential syntactic differences between Chinese and English. It is not to be taken as a chapter on translation, though inevitably it does touch on the subject.

Parts of the additional chapters inevitably reiterate some of the grammatical points already made in the book, but we hope that they offer a fresh approach to Chinese syntax.

We owe thanks to many people, but we are most indebted to Andrea Hartill, the senior editor of Routledge, whose enthusiasm for this project and words of encouragement have given us the impetus to complete this revision of the book with its five new chapters. Her assistant Isabelle Cheng has also provided enormous help and support.

We would also like to mention the help of the Library of the University of Leeds and the SCONUL scheme, which have given us access to library facilities throughout Britain.

Finally, it goes without saying that any faults and errors are entirely the responsibility of the authors.

YPC and DR
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Introduction

This book aims to provide a comprehensive grammar of Chinese. It is intended for readers who have some knowledge of the language and are at ease with its written form, whether in traditional characters or romanisation. We have endeavoured to minimise the use of technical expressions, but, where linguistic terms are introduced, we have provided explanations.

We believe that a comprehensive grammar has to be comprehensive in two senses. First, it must highlight the specific characteristics of the language being described and, where appropriate, indicate how they differ from those of other languages. In the case of Chinese, for example, syntactic rules are often seen to be operational in conjunction with semantic, prosodic and discoursal principles. Second, the grammar must be able to cover (and therefore generate) all possible (and acceptable) constructions in the language. We have consequently adopted an eclectic approach and have made reference to a range of grammatical theories in order to achieve what we hope is a multiperspective approach: semantic, pragmatic, stylistic, prosodic, structural, functional, discoursal, transformational and generative. In our view, syntactic generalisations become comprehensive only when they are underpinned by judgements on particular language characteristics that draw on theoretical approaches relevant to those characteristics.

The layout of the grammar

For ease of reference, each chapter provides an independent exposition of a particular grammatical feature and can be consulted by readers wishing to investigate that feature. Footnotes offer cross-references to related issues in other chapters. Lists of language examples are given throughout to illustrate points under discussion, and each example is in Chinese script

and romanisation, with an English translation and, where needed, a literal translation.

The book lays particular stress on functional types of sentence in Chinese, and this has influenced the sequencing of chapters. The non-morphological nature of the language, with the resultant absence of noun and verb inflection, and of general markers for definite and indefinite reference, means that most grammatical features have to be seen in the context of the sentence, or more usefully the sentence type, as a whole. We have identified four basic sentence types and a fifth overriding type, and these are discussed in detail in [Chapters 20](#) and [21](#). The four basic types are: **narrative** (action-verb based and associated with the completed action marker); **descriptive** (again generally featuring action verbs, but with continuous action markers); **expository** (covering a range of explanatory statements, relating to existence, possession, cognition, experience, etc., with no verbal markers apart from one indicating experience); and **evaluative** (also explanatory statements, but with a more judgemental tone, featuring modal verbs, etc., but with no verbal markers). Narrative and descriptive sentences have a subject–predicate structure, while expository and evaluative sentences are more likely to follow a topic–comment pattern. The endless variability and invention of language mean that this typology will inevitably have loose ends and overlapping dimensions, and the presence or function of sentence elements will sometimes blur the boundaries between types, but nonetheless, we hope that the structure we propose offers some clarification of the complexities of Chinese grammar.

The fifth overriding type we have called *le*-**expository**, because the particle *le* 了 is present at the end of the sentence, and its presence introduces a notion of change or reversal, which the speaker expresses with varying degrees of personal involvement. *Le* can in fact be added to any of the four sentence types identified above, and, as we shall see, it has a significant impact on the meaning of the sentence. *Le*-expository sentences are a highly distinctive feature of the Chinese language, and, because they express some degree of endorsement by a speaker, they are a particular feature of the spoken language.

The layout of the book reflects this typology. The first five chapters deal with noun-related issues; [Chapters 6](#) to [14](#) discuss elements in narrative and descriptive sentences; [Chapters 15](#) to [19](#) are more concerned with expository and evaluative sentences; [Chapters 20](#) and [21](#), as we have said, analyse sentence functional types; the final six chapters cover conjunctions, non-declarative sentences (interrogative and imperative) and other elements at work in sentences (omissions, and prosodic and stylistic features).

The Chinese language, or group of related languages, is spoken by the Hans, who constitute 94 per cent of China's population. One word for the language in Chinese is Hanyu 汉语, the Han language. Different, non-Han languages are spoken by the other 6 per cent of the population, the so-called minority peoples, such as the Mongols and the Tibetans.

The Chinese language is divided into a number of major dialects (with their many sub-dialects). Speakers of different dialects in some cases find each other unintelligible, but dialects are brought together by the fact that they share a common script. This book describes the main and official dialect, which is known by a number of names: Mandarin, modern standard Chinese, or *putonghua* ('common speech'). It is spoken in its various sub-dialect forms by almost three-quarters of the Hans across the northern, central and western regions of the country, but its standard pronunciation and grammar are associated with the Beijing area of north China, though not with Beijing city itself. The other dialects are Wu (spoken in Jiangsu and Zhejiang, including Shanghai), Xiang (in Hunan), Cantonese (in Guangdong), Min (in Fujian), Hakka (in northeast Guangdong and other southern provinces) and Gan (in Jiangxi).

Cantonese, Min and Hakka are widely spoken among overseas Chinese communities. In Taiwan, a form of Min dialect is used, though the official language is Mandarin, brought over by the Nationalists in 1949, and called there *guoyu* ('national language'). Mandarin is also widely used in Singapore, where it is known as *huayu* ('Chinese language'). Elsewhere, Chinese emigrants took their particular dialects with them, and in Britain, for instance, the Chinese people, who are largely from Hong Kong, almost all speak Cantonese.

The Chinese character script existed virtually unchanged for two thousand years until a range of simplified forms began to be introduced by the mainland Chinese government in the 1950s. These simplified characters, which we employ in this book, are used throughout China and increasingly in Chinese communities outside China, though not Taiwan. Chinese has been transcribed into Western alphabetic script through various systems for over one hundred years, and this book makes use of the standard romanisation *pinyin*.

The formal written language of China until the early decades of the twentieth century was Classical Chinese, which, as the vehicle for all publicly acknowledged literature and for official documentation, was at the heart

of the Chinese cultural tradition. However, it had grown remote from spoken Chinese in syntax and lexis, and had a position somewhat akin to medieval Latin in relation to the Romance languages it had spawned. It was left behind by modern written styles, based on spoken Chinese, which have evolved over the last hundred years, but echoes of Classical Chinese remain in contemporary speech and writing, especially in literary and aphoristic registers. This continuing presence of the Classical today will be mentioned at various points in our analysis.

Chapter I

Nouns and nominalisations

Nouns in Chinese are not specifically identified as being nouns except in the case of those with suffixes like 子 *zi*, 儿 *er*,¹ 头 *tou*, etc. They are mainly disyllabic, but there are also quite a number of monosyllabic nouns in everyday vocabulary. Trisyllabic nouns are rare and polysyllabic nouns are even rarer, the latter being often regarded as nominal phrases. Chinese nouns do not under any circumstances inflect for case, gender or number,² though an unmarked common noun is normally assumed as being plural, e.g. 书 *shū* ‘books’ rather than ‘book’.

¹ 儿 *er* is essentially a nominal suffix but occasionally is found with other word classes, e.g. the verb 玩儿 *wánr* ‘to play, enjoy oneself’, and with some reduplicated adjectives, e.g. 好好儿 *hǎohǎor* ‘well, good’.

² An unmarked common noun is normally assumed as being plural. Also see §1.3 for the specific use of the plural suffix 们 *men*.

I.1 Nouns and categorisation

Nouns can be assigned to different categories with reference to their grammatical properties. Such categorisation, as we shall see, helps to highlight their usages, and identifies distinctive features relating to the use of measure words, definite and indefinite reference, plurality, etc.

I.1.1 Common nouns

Certain nouns are referable to classes of tangible (and sometimes discrete) entities, categories, events and phenomena in the natural or human world. They are generally known as common nouns and are linguistic labels we attach to ourselves and our surroundings. For example:

诗人	shīrén	poet
山	shān	hill; mountain
商店	shāngdiàn	shop
狗	gǒu	dog
牡丹	mǔdān	peony
鞋	xié	shoe(s)
盐	yán	salt
语言	yǔyán	language
音乐	yīnyuè	music
广告	guǎnggào	advertisement
电影	diànyǐng	film; movie
比赛	bǐsài	contest
战争	zhànzhēng	war
地震	dìzhèn	earthquake

Tangibility is not to be understood only in a macroscopic sense. Some entities may not be visibly observable, but their existence can be verified by means of instruments or by accompanying phenomena.

电	diàn	electricity
细胞	xìbāo	[biology] cell
分子	fēnzǐ	molecule
原子	yuánzǐ	atom

The so-called discreteness, on the other hand, does not necessarily imply separateness. Sometimes, such discreteness may be more pragmatic than real. For instance, 树枝 **shùzhī** ‘branch, twig’ is discrete but not separated from 树干 **shùgàn** ‘tree trunk’, and there is a similar pragmatic distinction between 腿 **tuǐ** ‘leg’ and 脚 **jiǎo** ‘foot’.

However, a most distinctive feature of a Chinese common noun is that some kind of measure word is normally used in conjunction with a number or demonstrative. In some cases, the measure is a classifier (a) and in others it is a universal or standard measure (b),³ which is generally associated with material nouns:⁴

(a) 一座山	yī zuò shān	a hill; a mountain
两朵花儿	liǎng duǒ huār	two flowers; two blossoms
四家商店	sì jiā shāngdiàn	four shops
五栋房子	wǔ dòng fángzi	five houses
那个人	nèi ge rén	that person
这本书	zhèi běn shū	this book

³ See [Chapter 2](#) for a full discussion of measure words in all their forms.

⁴ See §1.1.2 below.

(b) 一滴水	yī dī shuǐ ⁵ a drop of water
三片面包	sān piàn miànbāo three slices of bread
一杯茶	yī bēi chá a cup of tea
十度电	shí dù diàn ten units of electricity (for billing a consumer)
五公斤米	wǔ gōngjīn mǐ five kilos of rice
二十公升汽油	èrshí gōngshēng qìyóu twenty litres of petrol

⁵ The numeral 一 yī ‘one’ changes to a fourth tone when followed by a syllable of first tone, second tone or third tone, e.g. 一滴水 yī dī shuǐ ‘a drop of water’ as in this example, and also 一场雨 yì cháng yǔ ‘a fall of rain’, 一米 yì mǐ ‘one metre’, etc. It changes to a second tone when followed by a syllable with a fourth tone, e.g. 一块玻璃 yí kuài bōli ‘a (thick) piece of glass’ (see next page). However, it remains unchanged when followed by words of any tone when it is part of a cardinal or ordinal number, e.g. 第一天 dìyī tiān ‘the first day’, 二十一天 èrshí yī tiān ‘twenty-one days’, etc. (The tone change rule still applies in 一百 yì bǎi ‘one hundred’, 一千 yì qiān ‘one thousand’, 一万 yí wàn ‘ten thousand’, and 一亿 yí yì ‘one hundred million’.) As this is a rule-governed tonal modification, the *pinyin* annotations in this grammar do not reflect these changes.

1.1.2 Material nouns

There are a number of common nouns that may be regarded as **material nouns**. One important feature of these nouns is that, unlike other common nouns, which have their own specific measure words, material nouns must first be grouped, packaged, partitioned or measured in terms of national or international standards before they can be counted. For example:

玻璃	bōli	glass
铁	tiě	iron
水	shuǐ	water
空气	kōngqì	air

They may only be used in connection with grouping, packaging, partitioning or standard measures:

一块玻璃	yī kuài bōli	(partitioning)
	a (thick) piece of glass	
一片铁	yī piàn tiě	(partitioning)
	a (thin) piece of iron	
三瓶牛奶	sān píng niúniǎi	(packaging)
	three bottles of milk	
四堆沙	sì duī shā	(grouping)
	four heaps of sand	
两吨铁	liǎng dūn tiě	(standard measure)
	two tons of iron	
一斤盐	yī jīn yán⁶	(Chinese measure)
	a catty of salt	

⁶ 斤 *jīn* ‘catty’ is a Chinese measure of weight equivalent to half a kilogram or slightly over a pound.

Material nouns can also be distinguished from other common nouns in two further ways:

- (a) While, as indicators of small or imprecise number or amount, 一些 *yīxiē* ‘some’ and 几 *jǐ* (plus measure) ‘several; a few’ can be used with any common nouns, 一点(儿) *yīdiǎn(r)* ‘a little’ occurs only with material nouns:

一些书	yīxiē shū	some books
几本书	jǐ běn shū	a few books
*一点(儿)书	*yīdiǎn(r) shū	*a little books
一些水	yīxiē shuǐ	some water
几桶水	jǐ tǒng shuǐ	a few buckets/pails of water
一点(儿)水	yīdiǎn(r) shuǐ	a little water

- (b) When suffixed by the particle 的 *de*, a material noun more often indicates composition rather than possession:

铜的	tóng de	(made of) brass
塑料的	sùliào de	(made of) plastic
玻璃的	bōli de	(made of) glass

Compare the following sentences:

这个盒子是塑料的。 **zhèi ge hézi shì sùliào de**
(lit. this mw box is plastic *de*)

This is a plastic box. (material composition)

这个盒子是爸爸的。zhèi ge hézi shì bàba de
(lit. this mw box is father de)
This box belongs to father. (possession)

1.1.3 Collective nouns

Another group of Chinese common nouns has an inbuilt notion of plurality. They are known as **collective nouns**, and are usually formed by juxtaposing two hyponyms (a) or by tagging a measure to a noun (b). For example:

- | | | | |
|-----|----|------|-------------------------------------|
| (a) | 父母 | fùmǔ | parents (father and mother) |
| | 夫妇 | fūfù | a married couple (husband and wife) |
| | 子女 | zǐnǚ | children (sons and daughters) |

(Others include: 师生 shīshēng ‘teachers and students’, 亲友 qīnyǒu ‘friends and relatives’, 男女 nánǚ ‘men and women; boys and girls’, 人民 rénmin ‘people (as opposed to government)’, 城乡 chéngxiāng ‘cities and villages’, 院校 yuànxào ‘academic institutions’, 书报 shūbào ‘publications (books and newspapers)’, 文具 wénjù ‘stationery’, 树木 shùmù ‘trees’, 饭菜 fàncài ‘food (cooked rice and dishes for a meal)’, 财产 cáichǎn ‘possessions’, etc.)

- | | | | |
|-----|----|---------------------------------------|----------|
| (b) | 车辆 | chēliàng | vehicles |
| | | (一辆车 yī liàng chē a/one car) | |
| | 花朵 | huāduǒ | flowers |
| | | (一朵花 yī duǒ huā a/one flower/blossom) | |
| | 马匹 | mǎpǐ | horses |
| | | (一匹马 yī pǐ mǎ a/one horse) | |

(Others include: 人口 rénkǒu ‘population’, 枪支 qiāngzhī ‘rifles’, 船只 chuánzhī ‘shipping’, 书本 shūběn ‘books’, 纸张 zhǐzhāng ‘paper’, 砖块 zhuānkuài ‘bricks’, 事项 shìxiàng ‘matters’, 布匹 bùpǐ ‘(bolts of) cloth’, 田亩 tiánmǔ ‘cultivated land’, etc.)

A common feature of these collective nouns is that they are not differentiable into individual items by means of numerals and measures. For example:

- | | | |
|-------|---------------------|-----------------|
| *两个父母 | *liǎng ge fùmǔ | *two parents |
| *三辆车辆 | *sān liàng chēliàng | *three vehicles |

The only measure words that may be used with them are those of grouping, location or indeterminate amount. For example:

一对夫妻	yī duì fūqī a couple
一批人马	yī pī rén mǎ a cohort of people (assembled for a particular job)
一桌饭菜	yī zhuō fàn cài a table of food
一些亲朋	yīxiē qīnpéng some relatives and friends

1.1.4 Abstract nouns

A second major set of nouns is generally known as **abstract nouns**. Unlike common nouns, they are non-referrable to concrete objects or entities in the natural or human world. They are rather products of human epistemology, being convenient, summary labels used holistically to refer to complex or sophisticated situations, experiences, processes, qualities or phenomena in diverse areas of human endeavour. For example:

矛盾	máodùn	contradiction
名声	míngshēng	reputation
真理	zhēnlǐ	truth
范围	fànwéi	scope
前景	qiánjǐng	prospect
影响	yǐngxiǎng	influence
印象	yìnxiàng	impression

While common nouns are the basic stock of words sufficient for general purposes, abstract nouns are tools for conceptualisation and argument.

Abstract nouns may also be defined by a numeral/demonstrative and a measure word, but this measure is restricted to either the more general 个 *gè* or a measure word indicating type, e.g. 种 *zhǒng* ‘type, kind, category’ or the indeterminate number/amount measure 一些 *yīxiē* ‘some’ or 一点 *yīdiǎn* ‘a little’. For example:

那个真理	nèi ge zhēnlǐ that truth
一个印象	yī ge yìnxiàng an impression

一种影响	yī zhǒng yǐngxiǎng a certain influence
两种(不同的)情况	liǎng zhǒng (bù tóng de) qíngkuàng two (different) situations
这些矛盾	zhèxiē máodùn these contradictions
一点效果	yīdiǎn xiàoguǒ a little effect

1.1.5 Proper nouns

A third important set of nouns is **proper nouns**. They are unique labels used to identify particular individuals, items, places, etc. In other words, proper nouns have unique referents in the universe. For example:

孔子	kǒngzǐ	Confucius
中国	zhōngguó	China
火星	huǒxīng	Mars
佛教	fójiào	Buddhism

Proper nouns do not usually associate themselves with numerals and measure words except in a metaphorical sense. For example:

*三个火星	* sān ge huǒxīng	*three Mars
*两个孔子	* liǎng ge kǒngzǐ	*two Confucius's

but:

另一个孔子	lìng yī ge kǒngzǐ	another Confucius
两个中国	liǎng ge zhōngguó	two Chinas

1.1.6 Temporal and spatial nouns

A group of time and location words can be defined as temporal-spatial nouns. These nouns cut right across common, abstract and proper nouns to focus on the notions of time and space. They are, in fact, habitual cognitive linchpins in a speaker's awareness of daily happenings and events, their precedences, consequences and developments, and their venues and associations, and they help to order and rationalise thought processes. Without these temporal and spatial labels, narration would become impossible and argument would be devoid of logic.

Temporal nouns:

昨天	zuótiān	yesterday
去年	qùnián	last year
下周	xiàzhōu	next week
每天	měitiān	every day
新石器时代	xīnshíqì shídài	the Neolithic Age

Spatial nouns:

中国	zhōngguó	China
北京	běijīng	Beijing
伦敦	lúndūn	London
飞机场	fēijīchǎng	airport
火车站	huǒchēzhàn	railway station

What differentiates this group of nouns from the rest is their normal usage as adverbials with or without the help of the preposition-like coverb 在 zài ‘at, in, on, exist’. For example:

他昨天来看我。	tā zuótiān lái kàn wǒ	He came to see me yesterday.
他在中国访问。	tā zài zhōngguó fǎngwèn	He is touring China at the moment.

1.2 Nouns and reference

1.2.1 Definite or indefinite/generic reference

Proper nouns have unique referents and are therefore always of **definite reference** while abstract and material nouns usually have **indefinite** or **generic reference** when unqualified. Collective nouns, too, are by nature of indefinite reference. With common nouns, however, we are faced with a clear choice between definite and indefinite reference.

In a language without definite or indefinite articles like Chinese, the reference of unmarked nouns is influenced by a number of factors: context, sentence type, the position of the noun in relation to the verb in the sentence, and the nature of the verb itself.⁷ When we use the noun 书 *shū* ‘book’, for instance, we have no way of determining whether it means ‘the book(s)’ or ‘books’ in general until we place it in a sentence.

⁷ See [Chapter 20](#) for a full discussion of reference in relation to sentence types.

In a sentence with an action verb, whether transitive or intransitive, all preverbal unmarked nouns (being given information) are of definite reference, whereas all post-verbal unmarked nouns (new information) are generally of indefinite reference. For example:

书已经还了。shū yǐjīng huán le

The book/books has/have already been returned.

我去借书。wǒ qù jiè shū

I am going/went to borrow a book/some books.

孩子回来了。háizi huí lái le

The child/children has/have come back.

In some contexts, however, a post-verbal unmarked noun may be part of given information and therefore be of definite reference:

她去照顾孩子。tā qù zhàogù háizi

She went to look after the children.

With an expository verb like 是 shì 'to be', the pre-verbal position may also feature new information. It is therefore not impossible for pre-verbal nouns in expository sentences to acquire indefinite or generic reference as well as definite reference, depending on the context. For example:

书是知识与文化的使者。

shū shì zhīshí yǔ wénhuà de shǐzhě (indefinite/generic reference)

Books are messengers of knowledge and culture.

书是我买的。

shū shì wǒ mǎi de (definite reference) (lit. books are I buy **de**)

I bought the books.

Definite or indefinite reference may, of course, be formally marked by demonstratives or 'numeral + measure word' phrases.

这本书	zhèi běn shū	this book	(definite reference)
那本书	nèi běn shū	that book	(definite reference)
一本书	yī běn shū	a book/one book	(indefinite reference)
几本书	jǐ běn shū	a few books	(indefinite reference)
一些书	yīxiē shū	some books	(indefinite reference)

With the help of demonstratives and measure words, a definite-referenced noun may also be used post-verbally:

我看过这本书。wǒ kàn guo zhèi běn shū

I have read this book.

However, an indefinite-referenced noun, despite the fact that it has been specified by a ‘numeral + measure word’ phrase, cannot normally be featured in a pre-action-verb position:⁸

*一本书放在桌子上。***yī běn shū fàng zài zhuōzi shàng**

*A book was placed on the table.

⁸ This, however, happens increasingly in modern translations: e.g. 这时候, 一辆车开来了。zhè shíhòu yī liàng chē kāi lái le ‘At this moment a car drove up’, but it is still felt to be translationese by most Chinese readers.

As a general rule, the shift of an indefinite-referenced noun to a pre-action-verb position will entail the use of the verb 有 yǒu ‘there is/are, to exist, to have’:⁹

有(一)本书放在桌子上。yǒu (yī) běn shū fàng zài zhuōzi shàng¹⁰

There was a book on the table.

这时候, 有(一)辆车开来了。

zhè shíhòu yǒu (yī) liàng chē kāi lái le

At this moment a car drove up.

⁹ See Chapter 16: the verb 有 yǒu.

¹⁰ The numeral 一 yī ‘one’ is often omitted for reasons of speech rhythm, particularly when it is used to indicate indefinite reference (i.e. equivalent to the English indefinite article ‘a/an’) rather than the number itself. (See Chapter 26 Prosody and Syntax). It cannot be omitted if the number is to be emphasized (i.e. no more than ‘one’), e.g. 只有一本书放在桌子上。zhǐ yǒu yī běn shū fàng zài zhuōzi shàng ‘There is only one book on the table’. (See the exclusive reference use of 一 yī ‘one’ in the following section. Under such circumstances it can never be omitted.)

1.2.2 Exclusive reference

Apart from definite and indefinite/generic reference, **exclusive references** can also be expressed through the use of 一 yī ‘one’¹¹ plus a measure word or the adjective 什么 shénme ‘any’. Exclusive-referenced nouns are invariably positioned pre-verbally, and are always accompanied by the obligatory use of an adverb 也 yě ‘also’ or 都 dōu ‘all’ in the predicate or comment:

我一本书也没借。wǒ yī běn shū yě méi jiè

I didn’t borrow a single book.

他什么书都看。tā shénme shū dōu kàn

He reads any books.

¹¹ See also §16.1.

1.3 Nouns and plurality

Collective nouns, as we have seen, possess inbuilt notion of plurality and are therefore not definable by precise numbers (see §1.1.3).

Proper nouns derive their singularity or plurality from their corresponding referents.

英国	yīngguó	Britain	(singular)
基督教徒	jīdū jiàotú	Christians	(singular/plural)

With **abstract nouns**, the notion of plurality does not normally arise. If it does, it is in a metaphorical and non-numerical sense. An abstract noun can usually only be made to associate with the numeral 一 yī ‘one’. For example:

一线希望	yī xiàn xīwàng	a gleam of hope
一派胡言	yī pài húyán	a pack of nonsense

It is only with **common nouns** that there is an obvious choice as to whether they are plural or singular, and plurality is generally indicated by a ‘numeral + measure word’ phrase:

五个学生	wǔ ge xuésheng	five students
两只小猫	liǎng zhī xiǎomāo	two kittens
三把刀	sān bǎ dāo	three knives

In addition 一些¹² yīxiē ‘some’, 几 jǐ plus a measure word ‘a few’, and other established adjectives like 许多 xǔduō ‘many’, 不少 bùshǎo ‘quite a few’, etc., can be used:

一些苹果	yīxiē píngguǒ	some apples
几个人	jǐ ge rén	a few people
许多商店	xǔduō shāngdiàn	many shops
不少书	bùshǎo shū	quite a few books

¹² The indeterminate plural measure 些 xiē occurs with the numeral 一 yī and no others. It is also used with the demonstratives 这 zhè and 那 nà to form the plural demonstrative adjectives 这些 zhèxiē ‘these’ and 那些 nàxiē ‘those’ (see §3.2). The 一 yī ‘one’ in 一些 yīxiē ‘some’ may sometimes be omitted.

Similarly, in the case of **material nouns**, plurality is expressed in conjunction with their measures or through rough estimation. For example:

一块布	yī kuài bù	(singular: partitioning)
	a piece of cloth	

两匹布	liǎng pǐ bù	(plural: packaging)
	two bolts of cloth	
一批布	yī pī bù	(singular: group)
	a batch of cloth	
两尺布	liǎng chǐ bù	(plural: standard
	two Chinese feet of cloth	measures)
一些/一点儿布	yīxiē/yīdiǎnr bù	(rough estimate)
	some cloth	

With **human nouns** there is a standard plural suffix form 们 **men**. Some restrictions, however, apply to its use: it normally relates to people in groups, and therefore regularly occurs as a term of address in gatherings, e.g. 朋友们 **péngyoumen** ‘friends’, 先生们、女士们 **xiānshengmen nǚshìmen** ‘ladies and gentlemen’; it is not used with numbers, e.g. ‘three children’ is therefore 三个孩子 **sān ge hái zi** rather than *三个孩子们 ***sān ge háizimen**; and when it is present in a sentence, the noun to which it is suffixed is invariably of definite reference:

客人们	kèrenmen	<u>the</u> guests
孩子们	háizimen	<u>the</u> children

It should also be noted that there are a small number of nouns in the language that, whatever their category, cannot be quantified at all (unless metaphorically). They provide some form of overall description: from natural phenomena to social conditions and human traits.¹³ For example:

大自然	dàzìrán	nature
天空	tiānkōng	the sky
海洋	hǎiyáng	the ocean
波涛	bōtāo	billows, great waves
潮汐	cháo xī	the morning and evening tides
地势	dìshì	topography, terrain
风水	fēngshuǐ	fengshui, geomancy
烈日	lièrì	the scorching sun
国防	guófáng	national defence
金融	jīnróng	finance
民意	mínyì	public opinion, the will of the people
行政	xíngzhèng	administration
全局	quánjú	the overall situation
人类	rénlèi	humankind
商业	shāngyè	commerce

¹³ The list is not exhaustive.

政治	zhèngzhì	politics
身心	shēnxīn	body and mind
体魄	tǐpò	physical condition
外表	wàibiǎo	physical appearance
心灵	xīnlíng	heart, soul
仪表	yíbiǎo	demeanour
智能	zhìnéng	intelligence
眼界	yǎnjiè	outlook, field of vision
胸怀	xiōnghuái	frame of mind

1.4 Nouns and syntactic functions

Nouns, whatever their category, and noun phrases may contract the following syntactic relationships with other word classes in a syntactic construction – phrasal as well as sentential:

Phrasal:

- (a) as an attributive with or without 的 *de* indicating attribution or possession:

<u>电脑</u> 世界	diànnǎo shìjiè	the computer world
<u>电脑</u> 的将来	diànnǎo de jiānglái	the future of computers

- (b) as a headword modified by an adjectival attributive with or without 的 *de*:

<u>新书</u>	xīn shū	new books
<u>年轻</u> 的诗人	niánqīng de shīrén	a young poet
<u>美丽</u> 的 <u>风景</u>	měilì de fēngjǐng	a beautiful view

- (c) as a headword modified by a ‘numeral + measure word’ phrase:

一个 <u>诗人</u>	yī ge shīrén	a poet
两架 <u>飞机</u>	liǎng jià fēijī	two aircraft

- (d) as an object governed by a preposition or coverb:

<u>靠墙</u>	kào qiáng	against the wall
<u>沿着</u> <u>大路</u>	yánzhe dàlù	along the road

- (e) as a headword followed by a full or abbreviated postposition:

<u>桌子上边</u>	<u>zhuōzi shàngbian</u>	on the table
<u>桌子上</u>	<u>zhuōzi shàng</u>	on the table

- (f) as items juxtaposed to each other or joined together by conjunctions:

<u>楼上楼下</u>	<u>lóushàng lóuxià</u>	upstairs and downstairs
<u>桌子和椅子</u>	<u>zhuōzi hé yǐzi</u>	tables and chairs

Sentential:

- (g) as the subject of a sentence:

<u>飞机起飞了。</u>	<u>fēijī qǐfēi le</u>	The plane took off.
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- (h) as the topic of a sentence:

<u>电脑十分有用。</u>	<u>diànnǎo shífēn yǒu yòng</u>	Computers are extremely useful.
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- (i) as a predicative after 是 shì ‘to be’:

<u>这位是诗人。</u>	<u>zhèi wèi shì shīrén</u>	This gentleman/lady is a poet.
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- (j) as a nominal predicate:¹⁴

<u>今天星期五。</u>	<u>jīntiān xīngqī wǔ</u>	Today is Friday.
<u>小孩今年四岁。</u>	<u>xiǎohái jīnnián sì suì</u>	My child is 4.

¹⁴ A nominal predicate can always be reworded to include the expository verb 是 shì ‘to be’: e.g. 今天是星期五。jīntiān shì xīngqī wǔ ‘Today is Friday’. Predicates like these are restricted to the predication of time, date, size, weight, length, height, price, age, nationality, birthplace, personal physical or psychological traits, etc. Physical and psychological traits are represented by phrases like 高个儿 gāogèr ‘a tall person’, 急性子 jíxìngzi ‘a person of fiery temper’, etc. For example, 这个人急性子。zhèi ge rén jíxìngzi. ‘This person is hot-tempered’.

- (k) as the object of a transitive verb:

<u>他很尊敬老师。</u>	<u>tā hěn zūnjìng lǎoshī</u>	He respects teachers very much.
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- (l) as an adverbial:

<u>他昨天回来。</u>	<u>tā zuótiān huílai</u>	He came back yesterday.
<u>他一个人回来。</u>	<u>tā yī ge rén huílai</u>	He came back on his own.

Apart from temporal nouns, which are almost always used as adverbials, there are a very restricted number of nouns that may be sometimes used (with or more often without the adverbial marker 地 *de*) as adverbials. The most common ones are:

表面	biǎomiàn	surface > superficially
部分	bùfen	part > partially
集体	jítǐ	collective > collectively
和平	héping	peace > peacefully
本能	běnnéng	instinct > instinctively
历史	lìshǐ	history > historically
逻辑	luóji	logic > logically

1.5 Nouns and semantic fields

Nouns may be compartmentalised into definable categories in terms of meaning. These definable categories are generally known as **semantic fields**. One salient feature of these categories is their established or potential **hyponymic relationship** with one another. For example, a semantic field concerning meteorological phenomena in Chinese may have a superordinate term 气象 *qìxiàng* ‘meteorology’ dominating the following hyponyms:

雨	yǔ	rain
雪	xuě	snow
冰	bīng	ice
雹子	báozǐ	hailstone
风	fēng	wind
云	yún	cloud
霜	shuāng	frost
露水	lùshuǐ	dew
虹	hóng	rainbow
彩霞	cǎixiá	sunset clouds
雾	wù	fog
烟雾	yānwù	smog
雷	léi	thunder
闪电	shǎndiàn	lightning

These terms may seem different from one another, but in their written form they mostly share the common radical 雨 *yǔ* ‘rain’: 雪 *xuě*, 霜 *shuāng*, 雹 *báo*, 露 *lù*, 霞 *xiá*, 雾 *wù*, 雷 *léi*, and the original, unsimplified versions of 电 *diàn* (電) and 云 *yún* (雲). If we go further and try to retrieve co-hyponyms of, for example, 雨 *yǔ* ‘rain’ or 风 *fēng* ‘wind’ down the

semantic ladder, we will find that most terms are organised with the super-ordinate terms themselves as headwords:

雨 yǔ 'rain':		
大雨	dà yǔ	heavy rain
毛毛雨	máomáo yǔ	drizzle
阵雨	zhèn yǔ	shower
暴风雨	bàofēng yǔ	storm

风 fēng 'wind':		
微风	wēi fēng	breeze
大风	dà fēng	gale
台风	táifēng	typhoon
飓风	jùfēng	hurricane
龙卷风	lóngjuǎnfēng	tornado

In the Chinese lexicon, in fact, hyponymic or co-hyponymic relationships like the above are often realised in terms of a **suffix-like form** shared by the hyponyms or co-hyponyms in the field. For example:

superordinate term:	专家	zhuānjiā specialist; professional
co-hyponyms:	作家	zuòjiā writer
	画家	huàjiā painter
	音乐家	yīnyuèjiā musician
	艺术家	yìshùjiā artist
	探险家	tànxiǎnjiā explorer
	慈善家	císhànjiā philanthropist
superordinate term:	交通工具	jiāotōng gōngjù means of transport
co-hyponyms:	火车	huǒchē train
	电车	diànchē tram; trolley

汽车	qìchē car
缆车	lǎnchē cable car
摩托车	mótuōchē motorcycle
自行车	zìxíngchē bicycle

co-hyponyms of 汽车 **qìchē** ‘car’:

长途汽车	chángtú qìchē coach
公共汽车	gònggòng qìchē bus
出租汽车 ¹⁵	chūzū qìchē taxi
小汽车	xiǎoqìchē private car
货车	huòchē lorry, truck

¹⁵ Nowadays there is an increasing use of 的士 **díshì** for ‘taxi’ (in place of 出租汽车 **chūzū qìchē**) in everyday speech, 的士 **díshì** borrows the Cantonese transliteration of ‘taxi’. 打的 **dǎdí** means ‘to take a taxi’.

Another salient feature of these semantic fields are the sets of **part-and-whole relationships**, which are often expressed in terms of a **prefix-like form** shared by the members of the same field. For example:

车头	chētóu	the front of a car
车身	chēshēn	the body of a car
车尾	chēwěi	the rear of a car
车轮	chēlún	wheel (of a car)
车胎	chētāi	tyre
车闸	chēzhá	brake
车牌	chēpái	number plate
山顶	shāndǐng	peak; summit
山腰	shānyāo	halfway up (a mountain)
山脚	shānjiǎo	foot (of a mountain)
山坡	shānpō	slope
山脊	shānjǐ	ridge
山谷	shāngǔ	ravine; valley
山坞	shānwù	glen; col

鞋底	xiédǐ	sole (of shoe)
鞋跟	xiégēn	heel
鞋帮	xiébāng	upper (of shoe)
鞋带	xiédài	shoelace
花瓣	huābàn	petal
花蕾	huālěi	bud
花蕊	huāruǐ	stamen or pistil
花粉	huāfěn	pollen

Such attributions may often extend to **spatial affinity relationships** in diverse senses. For example,

花盆	huāpén	flower pot
花瓶	huāpíng	flower vase
花篮	huālán	basket of flowers
花园	huāyuán	garden
花匠	huājiàng	gardener

1.6 Nominalisations

Nominalisation in Chinese does not usually seek morphological conversions. It is always **context-dependent**. In other words, all nominalisations are contextual nominalisations.

A verb or an adjective may be taken as a noun therefore only in a given context or grammatical framework: for example 广播 **guǎngbō** ‘to broadcast’ in origin is a verb, as in 广播新闻 **guǎngbō xīnwén** ‘to broadcast news’. However, if the order of the two words is reversed, 新闻广播 **xīnwén guǎngbō** will mean ‘news broadcast’, in which the word ‘broadcast’ may be said to have been nominalised according to its headword status in the collocation.

Again, 美 **měi** ‘beautiful’ in 这个菜的味道真美 **zhèi ge cài de wèidào zhēn měi** ‘This dish tastes really delicious’ (lit.: the taste is really beautiful) is undoubtedly an adjective. However, in a context such as the following, it functions as a noun: 外表的美不等于内心的美 **wàibiǎo de měi bù dēngyú nèixīn de měi** ‘Beauty in appearance is not the same as beauty at heart’.

Contextual nominalisation, as we can see, occurs essentially with verbs and adjectives when they are used as grammatical topics or objects. Other word classes are less likely to become nominalised. Here are a few

more examples, in which the verbs 研究 *yánjiū* ‘to study, to research into’, 发现 *fāxiàn* ‘to discover’ and 判断 *pànduàn* ‘to judge’ have been made nouns:

他对这个问题进行了研究。

tā duì zhèi ge wèntí jìnxíng le yánjiū

He conducted some research into/made a study of the problem.

他然后根据自己的发现，对这个问题作出了判断。

**tā ránhòu gēnjù zìjǐ de fāxiàn | duì zhèi ge wèntí zuòchū le
pànduàn**

He then, based on his discovery, made a judgement on the problem.

Chapter 2

Numerals and measures

2.1 Digits, units and cardinal numbers

There are eleven digital notations in Chinese:

零	líng ¹	zero
一	yī	one
二	èr (两 liǎng) ²	two
三	sān	three
四	sì	four
五	wǔ	five
六	liù	six
七	qī	seven
八	bā	eight
九	jiǔ	nine
十	shí	ten

¹ The digit 零 líng ‘zero’, apart from indicating itself, is used only in ordinals, decimals or numbers larger than 100.

² 两 liǎng ‘two’ is used with measures and nouns rather than 二 èr: 两个人 liǎng ge rén ‘two people’, 两点钟 liǎng diǎn zhōng ‘two o’clock’. However, this does not apply to numbers over ten, e.g. 十二个人 shí’ér ge rén ‘twelve people’, 五十二岁 wǔshí èr suì ‘52 years old’. Also, when 两 liǎng itself is used as a measure word meaning ‘tael’ or ‘50 grams’, 二 èr is preferred to avoid a euphonic clash.

Cardinal integers or round figures from eleven to ninety-nine are formed by arranging in different sequences the ten digits from one to ten. For example:

twelve	十二	shí’èr
nineteen	十九	shíjiǔ
twenty	二十	èrshí
ninety	九十	jiǔshí
twenty-nine	二十九	èrshí jiǔ
ninety-two	九十二	jiǔshí èr

Numbers above 100 make use of a set of **unitary notations**, some of which are peculiar to Chinese. They are:

百	bǎi	hundred
千	qiān	thousand
万	wàn	ten thousand
亿	yì	hundred million
兆	zhào	million million/trillion

The differences between Chinese and English unitary notations are therefore as follows:

	trillion	billion	hundred million	million	ten thousand	thousand	hundred	ten	one
English	1, 0 0 0,	0 0 0,	0 0 0,	0 0 0,	0 0 0,	0 0 0,	0 0 0,	0 0 0,	0 0 0,
Chinese	兆	十亿	亿	百万	万	千	百	十	个 ³

³ 个 gè, the most commonly used measure word (see §2.8.2 below), is generally used to represent one-digit numbers (个位数 gè wèi shù).

We can see that, compared with English, where beyond a thousand a new unitary notation is introduced every three places, in the Chinese system, a new notation is used every four places beyond ten thousand (万 wàn).

Here are some examples demonstrating the conversion:

100	一百 yī bǎi
125	一百二十五 yī bǎi èrshí wǔ
3,236	三千二百三十六 sān qiān èr bǎi sānshí liù
54,321	五万四千三百二十一 wǔ wàn sì qiān sān bǎi èrshí yī
543,217	五十四万三千二百一十七 wǔshí sì wàn sān qiān èr bǎi yīshí qī
1,200,000	一百二十万 yī bǎi èrshí wàn
1,100,000,000	十一亿 shíyī yì

Note that in counting numbers larger than one hundred, 一 yī ‘one’ has to be incorporated before tens as well. Compare:

18	十八	shíbā
118	一百一十八	yī bǎi yīshí bā

零 líng ‘zero’ has to be introduced into a number where one or more consecutive unitary notations are missing. Compare:

1,981	一千九百八十一	yī qiān jiǔ bǎi bāshí yī
1,081	一千零八十一	yī qiān líng bāshí yī
1,001	一千零一	yī qiān líng yī
10,101	一万零一百零一	yī wàn líng yī bǎi líng yī

2.2 Ordinals

Ordinals in Chinese are formed simply by adding the prefix 第 dì to cardinal numbers. For example:

一 yī	one	>	第一 dì yī	first
五 wǔ	five	>	第五 dì wǔ	fifth
一百零一 yī bǎi líng yī	one hundred and one	>	第一百零一 dì yī bǎi líng yī	one hundred and first

Other examples are:

第十一图	dì shíyī tú	Diagram 11
第八表	dì bā biǎo	Chart 8
第二卷	dì èr juàn	Volume 2 (of a set of books)
第十二页	dì shí'èr yè	Page 12

However, not all sequencing in ordinals in English is convertible into corresponding ordinals in Chinese. For example:

Year Two (i.e. the second year)	二年级	èr niánjí
	not: *第二年级	*dì èr niánjí
second floor	三楼	sān lóu
	not: *第三楼	*dì sān lóu

If there are any rules that can be followed, it seems that in classification or gradation, 第 dì will normally be dropped:

一等舱	yī děng cāng	first class (on a ship or plane)
二级商品	èr jí shāngpǐn	second-class commodities
三流作品	sān liú zuòpǐn	third-class works (of art or literature)

And if the item is one from an established series,⁴ it is customary, too, for 第 *dì* to be left out:

五路车	wǔ lù chē	Bus Route 5, the number 5 bus
六号房	liù hào fáng	Room 6

⁴ Books and journals are exceptions, e.g. 第四册 *dì sì cè* ‘Vol. 4’, 第七期 *dì qī qī* ‘Issue No. 7’, because without the ordinal marker 第 *dì*, the phrases may respectively mean: ‘4 volumes (of books)’ and ‘4 issues (of journals)’.

Also, for the sake of succinctness, ordinals are often represented by cardinals following nouns:⁵

图四	tú sì	Diagram 4
表五	biǎo wǔ	Chart 5
例六	lì liù	Example 6
练习七	liànxí qī	Exercise 7
附录三	fùlù sān	Appendix 3

⁵ This is more so in written Chinese. In spoken Chinese, cardinals more commonly precede nouns.

2.3 Enumeration

Cardinal numbers indicate amounts and ordinal numbers position in a sequence. **Enumeration** is the expression of a number, particularly a large number, for its own sake, e.g. in a telephone directory or on a meter.

Enumeration requires that the numbers be used one after another in a linear succession:

2783697	二七八三六九七 èr qī bā sān liù jiǔ qī
(0113) 2333463	零一一三二二三三四六三 líng yāo yāo sān èr sān sān sān sì liù sān ⁶

⁶ Note that 一 *yī* ‘one’ can often be expressed orally, particularly over the telephone, as 一 *yāo* ‘one’ to rule out the possibility of its being confused with 七 *qī* ‘seven’.

It is also used to refer to particular years:

2001	二零零一年 èr líng líng yī nián (lit. two zero zero one year) ⁷
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⁷ Please also note the widespread use of Arabic numerals rather than Chinese numerals in modern documentation.

However, centuries and decades are expressed in terms of cardinal numbers:

二十一世纪	èrshí yī shìjì	the twenty-first century
八十年代	bāshí niándài	the (nineteen) eighties

2.4 Fractions, percentages and decimals

2.4.1 Fractions

Fractions (分数 **fēnshù**) in Chinese are linguistically expressed in the standard way as a **numerator** (分子 **fēnzǐ**) that is a proportion of a **denominator** (分母 **fēnmǔ**). Both the numerator and the denominator are encoded in terms of cardinal numbers, formulaically, as:

denominator + 分之 **fēn zhī** + numerator

For example:

$\frac{1}{2}$	二分之一	èr fēn zhī yī
$\frac{2}{3}$	三分之二	sān fēn zhī èr
$\frac{5}{6}$	六分之五	liù fēn zhī wǔ
$\frac{1}{10}$	十分之一	shí fēn zhī yī

Literally, 二分之一 **èr fēn zhī yī** means ‘one out of two parts’, 三分之二 **sān fēn zhī èr** ‘two parts out of three’, and so on and so forth.

Improper fractions (假分数 **jiǎ fēnshù**), where the numerator is bigger than the denominator, are expressed in the same way:

$\frac{6}{5}$	五分之六	wǔ fēn zhī liù
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Complex fractions (繁分数 **fán fēnshù**), where the numerator or the denominator itself is a fraction, are expressed in a similar fashion:

$\frac{2/3}{1/2}$	二分之一分之三分之二	èr fēn zhī yī fēn zhī sān fēn zhī èr
	(two thirds over a half)	

Integers followed by fractions (带分数 **dài fēnshù**) adopt the following pattern:

cardinal number + 又 **yòu** ‘plus’ + denominator + 分之 **fēn zhī** + numerator

$1\frac{1}{2}$	一又二分之一	yī yòu èr fēn zhī yī
$5\frac{3}{4}$	五又四分之三	wǔ yòu sì fēn zhī sān

2.4.2 Percentages

Percentages (百分比 **bǎi fēn bǐ**) as fractions with one hundred as their denominator are expressed in the same way as fractions in Chinese. The only thing to note is that the number ‘hundred’ in the denominator is encoded in the formula as 百 **bǎi** on its own rather than its full form 一百 **yī bǎi**:

64%	百分之六十四	bǎi fēn zhī liùshí sì
101%	百分之一百零一	bǎi fēn zhī yī bǎi líng yī

2.4.3 Decimals

Decimals (小数 **xiǎo shù**) have two forms: the number before the decimal point may be read as a cardinal number or as an enumeration with the number after it always an enumeration. For example:

275.63	either	二百七十五点六三
	or	èr bǎi qīshí wǔ diǎn liù sān
		二七五点六三
		èr qī wǔ diǎn liù sān
1038.94	either	一千零三十八点九四
	or	yī qiān líng sānshí bā diǎn jiǔ sì
		一零三八点九四
		yī líng sān bā diǎn jiǔ sì

Note that the decimal point is always expressed as 点 **diǎn** ‘point’.

2.5 Imprecise numbers, halves and multiples

2.5.1 Imprecise numbers (约数 **yuēshù**)

In this section, we are including juxtaposition (one or two); approximation (about); indeterminate excess (over, more than).

2.5.1.1 Juxtaposition

This places two consecutive numbers under ten one after the other in the following kinds of formulation:

一两年	yī liǎng nián one or two years; a year or two
一、二十天	yī èrshí tiān ten to twenty days
一、二/两百人	yī èr/liǎng bǎi rén one to two hundred people
三、四千人	sān sì qiān rén three to four thousand people
七、八万头牛	qī bā wàn tóu niú seventy to eighty thousand cattle
十二、三万只羊	shí'èr sān wàn zhī yáng one hundred and twenty to thirty thousand sheep

but not:

*六十、七十匹马 *liùshí qīshí pǐ mǎ *sixty to seventy horses

2.5.1.2 Approximation

This is expressed in a number of ways:

(a) by placing 大约 dàyuē ‘approximately’ before the number:

大约五十三公斤	dàyuē wǔshí sān gōngjīn around 53 kilos
大约四十来天	dàyuē sìshí lái tiān about forty days
大约七十多岁	dàyuē qīshí duō suì about 70 years of age
大约一百人	dàyuē yī bǎi rén around one hundred people
大约三分之一强	dàyuē sān fēn zhī yī qiáng slightly over one-third

Note that 来 lái and 多 duō are sometimes added after unitary notations such as 十 shí ‘ten’, 百 bǎi ‘hundred’, etc., to emphasize the approximation.

(b) by putting 左右 zuǒyòu ‘around, about, more or less’ (lit. left-right) after a ‘number + measure’ phrase, where the associated noun is not usually identified but can be retrieved from the context:

两斤左右	liǎng jīn zuǒyòu	about two catties
三百名左右	sān bǎi míng zuǒyòu	around 300 people ⁸

- (c) by adding 来 *lái* to numbers rounded to ten after unitary notations such as 十 *shí* ‘ten’, 百 *bǎi* ‘hundred’ and 千 *qiān* ‘thousand’, etc.:

十来天	shí lái tiān	about ten days
二十来岁	èrshí lái suì	around 20 years old
三百来人	sān bǎi lái rén	around 300 people

- (d) similarly, by adding 把 *bǎ* to the single unitary notations 个 *gè* ‘one’, 百 *bǎi* ‘hundred’, 千 *qiān* ‘thousand’ and 万 *wàn* ‘ten thousand’:

个把星期	gè bǎ xīngqī	around a week
百把人	bǎi bǎ rén	around one hundred people
千把块钱	qiān bǎ kuài qián	around 1,000 <i>yuan</i> ⁹

⁸ 名 *míng* is a measure for people in lists, e.g. candidates, recruits, team members, etc.

⁹ 一元 *yī yuán* ‘one *yuan*’ in Chinese currency may be expressed colloquially as 一块(钱) *yī kuài (qián)* ‘one *yuan*’, 十五元 *shíwǔ yuán* ‘fifteen *yuan*’ as 十五块(钱) *shíwǔ kuài (qián)*, etc.

2.5.1.3 Indeterminate excess

This is usually conveyed by adding 多 *duō* ‘many’ to numbers rounded to ten, and this applies to any such number from ten upwards:

十多 ¹⁰	shí duō	over ten; more than ten
二十多	èrshí duō	twenty and more
一百多年	yī bǎi duō nián	over one hundred years
两百多人	liǎng bǎi duō rén	more than two hundred people
三千多	sān qiān duō	over three thousand
四万多	sì wàn duō	more than forty thousand
五亿多	wǔ yì duō	over five hundred million

¹⁰ Note that one does not say *十多 *yī shí duō* on its own, though one has to say 一百多 *yī bǎi duō*, 一千多 *yī qiān duō*, etc.

一百一十多	yī bǎi yīshí duō	over a hundred and ten ¹¹
两千三百六十多	liǎng qiān sān bǎi liùshí duō	more than 2,360
三万五千六百七十多	sān wàn wǔ qiān liù bǎi qīshí duō	over 35,670

¹¹ A sequence like this with 多 **duō** is not possible if any of the consecutive unitary notations is missing: *四千零八十多 *sì qiān líng bāshí duō *‘over four thousand and eighty’.

多 **duō** may of course come between two unitary notations when the former qualifies the latter:

十多万	shí duō wàn ¹²	over one hundred thousand
二十多万	èrshí duō wàn	more than 200,000
三百多万	sān bǎi duō wàn	over three million
四千五百六十多万	sì qiān wǔ bǎi liùshí duō wàn	more than 45,600,000

¹² If the quantifying unitary notation is 十 **shí**, two possibilities exist. One may say either 十多万 **shí duō wàn** ‘over ten thousand’ or 十万多 **shí wàn duō** ‘ten thousand and more’.

For all the above numbers with 多 **duō**, when the number is associated with a noun or measure and noun, 多 **duō** comes after the number and before the measure or noun:

八十多个人 ¹³	bāshí duō ge rén	over 80 people
三百多张纸	sān bǎi duō zhāng zhǐ	over 300 sheets of paper

¹³ In more formal styles, the measure word can be omitted with 人 **rén** e.g. 八十多人 **bāshí duō rén**.

多 **duō** can also be used with single-digit numbers up to ten when they occur with standard measures or with temporal nouns, which are de facto measures. In these cases, 多 **duō** comes after the standard measure and before the noun if there is one:

四公升多(汽油)	sì gōngshēn duō (qìyóu)	over 4 litres (of petrol)
六英里多(路)	liù yīnglǐ duō (lù)	over six miles
五年多(时间)	wǔ nián duō (shíjiān)	over five years

两点多(钟)
三个多月¹⁴

liǎng diǎn duō (zhōng)
sān ge duō yuè

shortly past 2 o'clock
over three months

¹⁴ The measure word 个 *gè/ge* may be used only in the case of time words such as 钟头 *zhōngtóu* 'hour', 礼拜 *lǐbài* 'week'.

几 *jǐ* 'a few' has a similar function to 多 *duō* with numbers rounded to ten, between ten and ninety, conveying the meaning 'slightly more than'. This holds for larger numbers too, provided the final digit is ten (or a multiple of ten):

十几人	shí jǐ rén	slightly more than ten people
五十几岁	wǔshí jǐ suì	a little over 50 years of age
九十几天	jiǔshí jǐ tiān	over ninety days
三百六十几本	sān bǎi liùshí jǐ běn	over 360 copies

几 *jǐ* 'a few' is of course itself an indicator of an imprecise number below ten and is used in the same way as numerals and placed before measure words:

几本书 ¹⁵	jǐ běn shū	a few books
几个人	jǐ ge rén	several people

¹⁵ In the same capacity, 几 *jǐ* may also be used to mean 'how many' when asking about a number below ten: e.g. 几本书? *jǐ běn shū* 'How many books?' (with the speaker presuming a number below ten).

In addition, 强 *qiáng* 'strong' and 弱 *ruò* 'weak' are added to fractions or percentages to mean respectively 'slightly more' or 'slightly less':

三分之一强	sān fēn zhī yī qiáng	slightly over one-third
百分之二十弱	bǎi fēn zhī èrshí ruò	slightly below 20 per cent

2.5.2 Halves

Half is expressed by 半 *bàn*, which, as a numeral, is followed by a measure word:¹⁶

半个苹果	bàn ge píngguǒ	half an apple
半天	bàn tiān	half a day
半年	bàn nián	half a year/six months
半个月	bàn ge yuè	half a month
半(个)小时 ¹⁷	bàn (ge) xiǎoshí	half an hour

¹⁶ See §2.8 below on measure words.

¹⁷ See §2.11.

However, when it means a half in addition to a number, it is placed after the measure and before the noun, if there is one:

一个半西瓜	yī ge bàn xīguā	one and a half melons
两天半	liǎng tiān bàn	two and a half days
三个半月	sān ge bàn yuè	three and a half months
两个半钟头	liǎng ge bàn zhōngtóu	two and a half hours

2.5.3 Multiples

Multiples (倍数 **bèishù**) are expressed by 倍 **bèi** ‘(one) time as much’ linked with the cardinal number that precedes it:

一倍半	yī bèi bàn	one and a half times as much
两倍	liǎng bèi	twice as much
三倍	sān bèi	three times as much
一百倍	yī bǎi bèi	a hundred times as much

Further examples are:

六是三的两倍。 **liù shì sān de liǎng bèi.**
(lit. six is three’s two times) Six is twice as much as three.

Note that the same multiple may be expressed in the form of a comparison:

六比三多一倍。 **liù bǐ sān duō yī bèi.**
(lit. six compared-with three more one time) Six is twice as much as three.

今年粮食的产量比去年增加了一倍。

jīnnián liǎngshí de chǎnliàng bǐ qù nián zēngjiā le yī bèi.
(lit. this year grain **de** output compared-with last year increase **le** one time)
This year’s grain output increased to twice as much as last year’s.

2.5.4 Additionals

Additionals are expressed with the help of 又 **yòu** ‘plus’ or 零 **líng** ‘and’ between the integrals and the additionals. For example,

三小时又一刻 **sān xiǎoshí yòu yī kè** three hours and a quarter
一个月又两天 **yī ge yuè yòu liǎng tiān** a month and two days
一又二分之一 **yī yòu èr fēn zhī yī** one and a half
十二块零五毛 **shí’èr kuài líng wǔ máo** twelve yuan five jiao
一年零五天 **yī nián líng wǔ tiān** a year and five days
两岁零三个月 **liǎng suì líng sān ge yuè** two years and three months old

2.6 Mathematical symbols and simple arithmetic equations

The mathematical symbols for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, etc. are expressed in Chinese in the following terms:

+	加	jiā	add, plus
−	減	jiǎn	subtract, minus
×	乘	chéng	multiply
÷	除以	chú yǐ	divided by
=	等于	děngyú	equal/be equal to

1 + 1 = 2	一加一等于二	yī jiā yī děngyú èr
2 − 1 = 1	二減一等于一	èr jiǎn yī děngyú yī
3 × 3 = 9	三乘三等于九	sān chéng sān děngyú jiǔ
12 ÷ 4 = 3	十二除以四等于三	shí'èr chú yǐ sì děngyú sān

Other common symbols are expressed as:

>	大于	dà yú	bigger than
<	小于	xiǎo yú	smaller than
:	比	bǐ	as compared with/proportionate to
[] ⁴	四次方	sì cì fāng	to the power of 4, etc.

For example:

2 : 5	二比五	èr bǐ wǔ	two as against five
4 ³	四的三次方	sì de sān cì fāng	the cube of four

2.7 The multiplication table

Multiplication tables in Chinese have a rhythm similar to English. When the result is a single digit or a multiple of ten, the word 得 **dé** 'obtain' is added. Otherwise, the pattern consists simply of enumerations followed by cardinal numbers.

二二得四	èr èr dé sì	Two twos are four.
二四得八	èr sì dé bā	Two fours are eight.
四五得二十	sì wǔ dé èrshí	Four fives are twenty.
三七二十一	sān qī èrshí yī	Three sevens are twenty-one.
六八四十八	liù bā sìshí bā	Six eights are forty-eight.
九九八十一	jiǔ jiǔ bāshí yī	Nine nines are eighty one.

2.8 Measure words

Chinese, like other languages, has standard measure words relating to distance, weight, volume, etc. or to such universal notions as parts, groups or packages:

一磅蘑菇	yī bàng mógu (mw: 磅 bàng pound in weight)	a pound of mushrooms
一片面包	yī piàn miànbāo (mw: 片 piàn piece; slice)	a slice of bread

However, Chinese is unique in that all nouns, when occurring with a number or demonstrative,¹⁸ generally incorporate a measure, whether or not there is any notion of ‘measuring’:

一本书	yī běn shū (mw: 本 běn copy)	a book
一张桌子	yī zhāng zhuōzi (mw: 张 zhāng spread)	a table

¹⁸ Virtually all the examples we will cite in the following sections will use the numeral 一 *yī* ‘one’. When unstressed 一 *yī* has the meaning ‘a(n)’ and our translations will reflect this.

In what follows, we will therefore distinguish between **standard measure words** and **classifying measure words** (or **classifiers**).

2.8.1 Standard measures

Standard measure words express universally accepted concepts of measurement on the one hand and packaging, grouping and partitioning on the other. For example:

2.8.1.1 National or international measures

两里路	liǎng lǐ lù	(a distance of) two <i>lǐ</i> ¹⁹
一英里路	yī yīnglǐ lù	a mile
一品脱啤酒	yī pǐntuō pījiǔ	a pint of beer
二十公升汽油	èrshí gōngshēng qìyóu	20 litres of petrol
两公斤苹果	liǎng gōngjīn píngguǒ	2 kilos of apples
三平方米(地毯)	sān píngfāng mǐ (dìtàn)	3 square metres (of carpet)

¹⁹ 里 *lǐ* is a Chinese measure of length or distance, which is equivalent to 500 metres or half a kilometre.

Others include: *length*: 公里 **gōnglǐ** ‘kilometre’, 公尺/米 **gōngchǐ/mǐ** ‘metre’, 公分/厘米 **gōngfēn/límǐ** ‘centimetre’, 码 **mǎ** ‘yard’, 英尺 **yīngchǐ** ‘foot’, 英寸 **yīngcùn** ‘inch’, 尺 **chǐ** ‘Chinese foot’, 寸 **cùn** ‘Chinese inch’; *weight*: 吨 **dūn** ‘ton’, 斤 **jīn** ‘catty’, 两 **liǎng** ‘tael’, 盎司 **àngsī** ‘ounce’, 克 **kè** ‘gram’, 毫克 **háokè** ‘milligram’; *volume*: 加仑 **jiālún** ‘gallon’, 立方米 **lìfāng mǐ** ‘cubic metre’; *area*: 公顷 **gōngqǐng** ‘hectare’, 英亩 **yīngmǔ** ‘acre’, 亩 **mǔ** ‘Chinese acre’²⁰; 打 **dǎ** ‘dozen’.

²⁰ 亩 **mǔ** ‘Chinese acre’ is equal to 1/6 of an acre or 1/15 of a hectare.

2.8.1.2 Packaging measures

Packaging measures usually identify the containers concerned:

一包香烟	yī bāo xiāngyān	a packet of cigarettes
一筒饼干	yī tǒng bǐnggān	a (tube-shaped) packet of biscuits
一盒巧克力	yī hé qiǎokèlì	a box of chocolate
一瓶酒	yī píng jiǔ	a bottle of wine
一杯咖啡	yī bēi kāfēi	a cup of coffee

Others include: 壶 **hú** ‘(tea) pot’, 罐 **guàn** ‘tin; can’, 锅 **guō** ‘pan; wok’, 碗 **wǎn** ‘bowl’, 盆 **pén** ‘basin’, 盘 **pán** ‘plate’, 碟 **dié** ‘dish; saucer’, 袋 **dài** ‘bag’, 箱 **xiāng** ‘box; suitcase’, 桶 **tǒng** ‘bucket; pail’, 篮 **lán** ‘basket’, 勺 **sháo** ‘spoonful’, 车 **chē** ‘car-load’, 船 **chuán** ‘ship-load’.

2.8.1.3 Grouping measures

Small indeterminate numbers or amounts

Some group measures are more precise, while others are less so. The two most common ones in Chinese are 一些 **yīxiē** ‘some’ and 一点儿 **yīdiǎnr** ‘a little’. As we can see, they are used invariably with the numeral 一 **yī** ‘one’:

一些苹果	yīxiē píngguǒ	some apples
一些朋友	yīxiē péngyou	some friends
一点儿牛奶	yīdiǎnr niúǎi	a little milk
一点儿希望	yīdiǎnr xīwàng	a bit of hope

As we saw in [Chapter 1](#), while 一些 *yīxiē* ‘some’ occurs with both common and material nouns, 一点儿 *yīdiǎnr* ‘a little’ is used only with material nouns:

一些钱	yīxiē qián	some money
一点儿钱	yīdiǎnr qián	a little money
一些朋友	yīxiē péngyou	some friends
*一点儿朋友	yīdiǎnr péngyou	*a few friends

However, although 一点儿 *yīdiǎnr* ‘a little’ and 一些 *yīxiē* ‘some’ are generally interchangeable when used with material nouns, 一点儿 *yīdiǎnr* ‘a little’ tends to connote a smaller amount, and, as a result, 一些 *yīxiē* ‘some’ never features when scarcity is the focal point:

我一点儿钱也没有。	wǒ yīdiǎnr qián yě méiyǒu	I haven't got a penny.
*我一些钱也没有。	wǒ yīxiē qián yě méiyǒu	*I haven't got a penny.

Clusters

Other group measure words can in most cases be used with any numerals. They are applicable either to animate beings or to inanimate objects, but in a few instances they occur with both.

For animate beings:

一班年轻人	yī bān niánqīng rén	a bunch of young people
一队战士	yī duì zhànshì	a file/troop of soldiers
一帮孩子	yī bāng háizi	a group of children
一股土匪	yī gǔ tǔfěi	a gang of bandits
一群羊 ²¹	yī qún yáng	a flock of sheep

²¹ 群 *qún* ‘crowd; group’ is a cluster measure for all animate beings:

一群牛	yī qún niú	a herd of cows
一群羊	yī qún yáng	a flock of sheep
一群狼	yī qún láng	a pack of wolves
一群鸟	yī qún niǎo	a flight of birds
一群鱼	yī qún yú	a shoal of fish
一群蜜蜂	yī qún mìfēng	a swarm of bees
一群人	yī qún rén	a crowd of people

Others include: 伙 *huǒ* ‘group’ (e.g. students), 批 *pī* ‘batch’, 起 *qǐ* ‘batch’, 拨 *bō* ‘group’.

For inanimate objects:

一束鲜花	yī shù xiānhuā	a bunch of flowers
一串钥匙	yī chuàn yàoshi	a bunch of keys
一挂鞭炮	yī guà biānpào	a string of firecrackers
一沓纸	yī dá zhǐ	a pile of paper
一笔钱	yī bǐ qián	a sum of money
一份报纸	yī fèn bàozhǐ	a newspaper

Others include: 套 **tào** ‘set’ (e.g. stamps), 叠 **dié** ‘pile’ (e.g. books), 排 **pái** ‘row’ (e.g. houses), 嘟噜 **dūlu** ‘cluster’ (e.g. grapes), 丛 **cóng** ‘clump’ (e.g. grass), 簇 **cù** ‘bunch’ (e.g. flowers), 汪 **wāng** ‘pool’ (e.g. water), 剂 **jì** ‘dose’ (e.g. medicine), 绺 **liǔ** ‘lock; skein’ (e.g. hair; thread).

For both animate beings and inanimate objects:

一堆人	yī duī rén	a throng of people
一堆土	yī duī tǔ	a heap of earth
一批人	yī pī rén	a group of people
一批货	yī pī huò	a batch of goods

Others include: 行 **háng** ‘row’, 列 **liè** ‘file’.

Pairs and couples

对 **duì** and 双 **shuāng**, both meaning ‘pair’, are used with nouns, animate and inanimate, that exist in some form of duality:

一对夫妇	yī duì fūfù	a married couple
一对枕头	yī duì zhěntou	a pair of pillows
一对耳环	yī duì ěrhuán	a pair of earrings
一双手	yī shuāng shǒu	a pair of hands
一双眼睛	yī shuāng yǎnjīng	a pair of eyes
两双鞋	liǎng shuāng xié	two pairs of shoes
三双袜子	sān shuāng wàzi	three pairs of socks

(Also for: 手套 **shǒutào** ‘gloves’, 筷子 **kuàizi** chopsticks.)

The difference between 对 **duì** and 双 **shuāng** seems to be that the former emphasises complementarity, while the latter indicates functioning together.

Pairs of things that are physically inseparable, and in English are viewed as ‘pairs’, do not use 对 **duì** or 双 **shuāng** in Chinese. For example:

一条裤子	yī tiáo kùzi	a pair of trousers
一把剪刀	yī bǎ jiǎndāo	a pair of scissors
一副眼镜	yī fù yǎnjìng	a pair of spectacles

Parts or series

Part is expressed by 一部分(的) *yī bùfen (de)* and series by 一系列的(的) *yī xiliè (de)*. Both of these terms may be preceded only by the numeral 一 *yī* ‘one’ and the particle 的 *de* is optional.

一部分人	<i>yī bùfen rén</i>	a section of the people
一部分工作	<i>yī bùfen gōngzuò</i>	part of the work
一部分时间	<i>yī bùfen shíjiān</i>	part of the time
一系列问题	<i>yī xiliè wèntí</i>	a series of problems
一系列政策	<i>yī xiliè zhèngcè</i>	a whole set of policies

2.8.1.4 Partitioning measures

Partitioning measure words, which represent part of a whole, are common in many languages. For example:

一块蛋糕	<i>yī kuài dàngāo</i>	a piece of cake
两片面包	<i>liǎng piàn miànbāo</i>	two slices of bread
一瓣儿蒜	<i>yī bàn'r suàn</i>	a clove of garlic
一截儿木头	<i>yī jiér mùtóu</i>	a chunk of wood
一滴水	<i>yī dī shuǐ</i>	a drop of water

Others include: 节 *jié* ‘section’ (e.g. railway coaches), 段 *duàn* ‘length’ (e.g. rope; string).

In the above, we see the partitioning of concrete objects. In fact, this process of partitioning may be applied to less concrete and more abstract things, where the measure is an item or an instance:

一起案子	<i>yī qǐ ànzi</i>	a crime
一项政策	<i>yī xiàng zhèngcè</i>	a policy
一桩事儿	<i>yī zhuāng shìr</i>	a matter
一门课程	<i>yī mén kèchéng</i>	an academic discipline
一宗心事	<i>yī zōng xīnshì</i>	a worrying matter

In a number of cases, this part-whole relationship can be extended to part of a series, concrete or less concrete:

一幕戏	<i>yī mù xì</i>	a scene in a play, opera, etc.
一顿饭	<i>yī dùn fàn</i>	a meal
一届毕业生	<i>yī jiè bìyèsheng</i>	graduates of a particular year
一班飞机	<i>yī bān fēijī</i>	a scheduled flight
一茬麦子	<i>yī chá màizi</i>	a crop of wheat
一期杂志	<i>yī qī zàzhì</i>	an issue of a magazine

Others include: 页 yè ‘page’, 味 wèi ‘ingredient’ (e.g. of (herbal) medicine).

These part-series measure words are in fact often used on their own in an ordinal form, with the associated headword being understood from the context:

第一届	dì yī jiè	the first batch (of graduates)
下一班	xià yī bān	the next (flight, train, etc.)
第二册	dì èr cè	Volume 2
第二版	dì èr bǎn	the second edition
上一期	shàng yī qī	the previous issue
这一代	zhèi yī dài	this generation (of people)
第三幕	dì sān mù	the third act (of a play)
第四组	dì sì zǔ	Group 4
第五批	dì wǔ pī	the fifth batch (of people, goods, etc.)
第六项	dì liù xiàng	the sixth item
第七页	dì qī yè	Page 7

2.8.2 *Classifying measures*

The so-called classifying measure words constitute the great majority of measure words in Chinese. They are not measures in the real sense of the word, but indicators of prominent features that can be attached to a particular set or class of nouns. That is why they are sometimes called classifiers by some grammarians. As with standard measures, these classifying measure words must be used when their associated nouns are qualified by numerals or demonstratives. For example, 把 bǎ, which is derived from 把 bǎ ‘handle’, is used as a classifier for things with a handle:

一把刀	yī bǎ dāo	a knife
两把锉	liǎng bǎ cuò	two files/rasps
三把锹	sān bǎ qiāo	three spades
四把扇子	sì bǎ shànzi	four (folding) fans
五把伞	wǔ bǎ sǎn	five umbrellas
六把扫帚	liù bǎ sàozhou	six brooms
七把剑	qī bǎ jiàn	seven swords
八把锯	bā bǎ jù	eight saws
这把斧子	zhèi bǎ fǔzi	this axe
那把茶壶	nèi bǎ cháhu	that teapot

This usage is then extended to everything that can be ‘held by the hand as if by a handle’:

一把尺	yī bǎ chǐ	a ruler (for measuring)
两把梳子	liǎng bǎ shūzi	two combs
三把钥匙	sān bǎ yàoshi	three keys
四把锁	sì bǎ suǒ	four locks
五把椅子	wǔ bǎ yǐzi	five chairs

and then further extended to anything that can be ‘held or scooped up by the handful’:

一把米	yī bǎ mǐ	a handful of rice
一把土	yī bǎ tǔ	a handful of earth
一把花	yī bǎ huā	a bunch of flowers
一把眼泪	yī bǎ yǎnlèi	a flood of tears
一把胡子	yī bǎ húzi	a beard

Metaphorical extensions are also possible:

一把年纪	yī bǎ niánjì	getting on in years (年纪 niánjì age)
一把力气	yī bǎ lìqì	quite strong (力气 lìqì strength)
一把劲儿	yī bǎ jìn	quite an effort

Other classifying measure words in the language are derived and used in a similar fashion. We will now discuss their particular usages in turn.

The most versatile multi-purpose measure word is 个 *gè* (usually unstressed as *ge* in its role as a measure word), which can be associated with most nouns, from human beings to inanimate objects and abstract concepts. For example:

一个人	yī ge rén	a person
一个朋友	yī ge péngyou	a friend
一个手表	yī ge shǒubiǎo	a watch
一个西瓜	yī ge xīguā	a watermelon
一个岛	yī ge dǎo	an island
一个城市	yī ge chéngshì	a city
一个电影	yī ge diànyǐng	a film
一个主意	yī ge zhǔyì	an idea

More often, however, particular sets of nouns that share common characteristics or belong to the same type are linked with more specific measure words. These associations are generally derived from shape, category or related activity. For example:

Long and narrow

一枝笔 yī zhī bǐ a pen

(Also for: 蜡烛 làzhú ‘candle’, 枪 qiāng ‘rifle’, 箭 jiàn ‘arrow’.)²²

²² Nouns associated with 枝 zhī may generally also use 支 zhī, but this does not apply the other way round in that, where 支 zhī is the normal measure for a noun, it cannot be replaced by 枝 zhī.

一支火箭 yī zhī huǒjiàn a rocket

(Also for: 军队 jūnduì ‘army or column of troops’, 牙膏 yágāo ‘tube of toothpaste’, 香 xiāng ‘joss-stick’,²³ 乐曲 yuèqǔ ‘musical composition or piece of music’.)

²³ Another measure word for 香 xiāng ‘joss-stick’ is 炷 zhù, particularly if the joss-stick is burning.

一根针 yī gēn zhēn a needle

(Also for: 线 xiàn ‘thread’, 弦 xián ‘string’ (on a violin, etc.), 铁丝 tiěsī ‘wire’, 头发 tóufa ‘hair’ (on the head), 毛 máo ‘hair’ (on the body), 火柴 huóchái ‘match’ (to light, set fire), 香肠 xiāngcháng ‘sausage’, 香蕉 xiāngjiāo ‘banana’, 骨头 gǔtou ‘bone’, 柱子 zhùzi ‘pillar; column’, 竹子 zhúzi ‘bamboo’.)

一杆枪 yī gǎn qiāng a rifle

(Also for: 称 chēng ‘steelyard’, 旗子 qízi ‘flag’.)

一管毛笔 yī guǎn máobǐ a writing brush

(Also for: 牙膏 yágāo ‘tube of toothpaste’, 箫 xiāo ‘vertical flute’, 笛子 dízi ‘flute’.)

一条虫 yī tiáo chóng a worm

(Also for: 蛇 shé ‘snake’, 绳子 shéngzi ‘rope’, 沟 gōu ‘ditch’, 河 hé ‘river’, 街 jiē ‘street’, 路 lù ‘road’, 鱼 yú ‘fish’, 狗 gǒu ‘dog’, 腿 tuǐ ‘leg’, 尾巴 wěiba ‘tail’, 黄瓜 huángguā ‘cucumber’, 裤子 kùzi ‘a pair of trousers’, 裙子 qúnzi ‘skirt’, 被单 bèidān ‘blanket’, 被子 bèizi ‘quilt’, 围巾 wéijīn ‘scarf’, 船 chuán ‘boat’.)

一道光 yī dào guāng a ray of light

(Also for: 闪电 shǎndiàn ‘lightning’, 虹 hóng ‘rainbow’, 篱笆 líba ‘bamboo or twig fence’, 河堤 hédi ‘dyke’, 眉毛 méimáo ‘eyebrow’, 伤疤 shāngbā ‘scar’.)

一缕炊烟 **yī lǚ chuīyān** a wisp/curl of smoke (from a chimney)
一股泉水 **yī gǔ quánshuǐ** a stream of spring water

Round or oval

一颗珠子 **yī kē zhūzi** a pearl

(Also for: 种子 **zhǒngzi** ‘seed’, 炸弹 **zhàdàn** ‘bomb’, 子弹 **zǐdàn** ‘bullet’, 手榴弹 **shǒuliúdàn** ‘hand-grenade’, 心 **xīn** ‘heart’, 牙齿 **yáchǐ** ‘tooth’, 星 **xīng** ‘star’, 糖 **táng** ‘sweet, candy’.)

一粒米 **yī lì mǐ** a grain of rice

(Also for: 豆子 **dòuzi** ‘pea; bean’, 花生 **huāshēng** ‘peanut’, 葡萄 **pútao** ‘grape’, 钻石 **zuànshí** ‘diamond’, 沙子 **shāzi** ‘a grain of sand; grit’.)²⁴

²⁴ 粒 **lì** and 颗 **kē** are generally interchangeable unless the object is larger, when only 颗 **kē** may be used.

一团毛线 **yī tuán máoxiàn** a ball of wool

(Also for: 面 **miàn** ‘dough’, 棉花 **miánhuā** ‘cotton wool’, 火 **huǒ** ‘fire’, 云 **yún** ‘a dense patch of cloud’.)

一轮明月 **yī lún míngyuè** a bright moon

(Also for: 红日 **hóngrì** ‘red sun’.)

Spread out and/or with a flat surface

一张纸 **yī zhāng zhǐ** a piece of paper

(Also for: 表 **biǎo** ‘chart’, 布告 **bùgào** ‘public notice’, 票 **piào** ‘ticket’, 邮票 **yóupiào** ‘stamp’, 照片 **zhàopiàn** ‘photograph’, 明信片 **míngxìnpiàn** ‘postcard’, 唱片 **chàngpiàn** ‘(music) record’, 床 **chuáng** ‘bed’, 桌子 **zhuōzi** ‘table’.)

一幅画²⁵ **yī fú huà** a painting

(Also for: 地图 **dìtú** ‘map’.)

²⁵ 幅 **fú** can usually be replaced by 张 **zhāng**.

一片叶子 **yī piàn yèzi** a leaf

(Also for: 面包 **miànbāo** ‘slice of bread’, 雪 **xuě** ‘snowflake’.)

一面镜子 **yī miàn jìngzi** a mirror

(Also for: 锣 **luó** ‘gong’, 旗 **qí** ‘flag’.)

一扇门 **yī shàn mén** a door

(Also for: 窗 **chuāng** 'window'.)

一块玻璃 **yī kuài bōli** a piece of glass

(Also for: 冰 **bīng** 'ice', 饼干 **bǐnggān** 'biscuit', 豆腐 **dòufu** 'beancurd', 肉 **ròu** 'meat', 肥皂 **féizào** 'soap', 地 **dì** 'land', 石头 **shítou** 'stone; rock', 砖 **zhuān** 'brick'.)

Resemblance

一口井 **yī kǒu jǐng**
a well (口 **kǒu** mouth; opening)

一头蒜 **yī tóu suàn**
a head or bulb of garlic (头 **tóu** head)

一尾鱼 **yī wěi yú**
a fish (尾 **wěi** tail)

两撇小胡子 **liǎng piě xiǎo húzi**
a moustache (lit. two strokes of moustache)
(撇 **piě** left-falling stroke in writing)

2.8.2.2 Category-oriented

Human beings

个 **gè** (often unstressed) is the general measure word for human nouns:

一个人	yī ge rén	one person
一个老师	yī ge lǎoshī	a teacher
一个医生	yī ge yīshēng	a doctor
一个工程师	yī ge gōngchéngshī	an engineer

Alternatives to 个 **gè**, in appropriate contexts, are 位 **wèi**, 名 **míng**, 员 **yuán**, 条 **tiáo**, 口 **kǒu**, etc. For example:

一位客人	yī wèi kèrén	(位 wèi : polite alternative) a guest
五名学生	wǔ míng xuésheng	(名 míng : for counting people) five students
四口人	sì kǒu rén	(口 kǒu : for family members) four in the family

一员大将	yī yuán dàjiàng	(员 yuán : for generals)
一条好汉	yī tiáo hǎohàn	(条 tiáo : for strong men)
	a senior general	
	a brave man	

Animals and insects

All animals, birds and insects use the measure word 只 **zhī**:

一只羊	yī zhī yáng	a sheep
一只狼	yī zhī láng	a wolf
一只老虎	yī zhī lǎohǔ	a tiger
一只老鼠	yī zhī lǎoshǔ	a mouse, rat
一只鸟	yī zhī niǎo	a bird
一只燕子	yī zhī yànzi	a swallow
一只麻雀	yī zhī máquè	a sparrow
一只鸡	yī zhī jī	a chicken
一只甲虫	yī zhī jiǎchóng	a beetle
一只蜻蜓	yī zhī qīngtíng	a dragonfly
一只蝴蝶	yī zhī húdié	a butterfly
一只青蛙	yī zhī qīngwā	a frog
一只蟹	yī zhī xiè	a crab

The only exceptions are fish, reptiles and worms, which are associated with 条 **tiáo**, as we saw at §2.8.2.1, and also the following:

一匹马	yī pǐ mǎ	a horse
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(Also for: 骡子 **luózi** ‘mule’, 骆驼 **luòtuó** ‘camel’.)

一头牛	yī tóu niú	a bull/cow; an ox
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(Also for: 驴 **lú** ‘donkey’, 象 **xiàng** ‘elephant’.)

一条狗	yī tiáo gǒu	a dog
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Plants

棵²⁶ **kē** is the measure word generally used with plants. For example:

一棵菜	yī kē cài	a cabbage
一棵草	yī kē cǎo	a tuft of grass ²⁷

²⁶ 棵 **kē** and 株 **zhū** are generally used interchangeably in this context.

²⁷ A blade of grass is expressed by another measure word, 茎 **jīng** (一茎草 **yī jīng cǎo**).

一棵葱	yī kē cōng	a spring onion
一棵麦子	yī kē màizi	a stalk of wheat
一棵树	yī kē shù	a tree

However, for flowers, there are four measure words, each used in different contexts:

一朵花	yī duǒ huā	a flower/blossom
一枝花	yī zhī huā	a flower or blossom on a stem or twig
一束花	yī shù huā	a bouquet (of flowers)
一簇花	yī cù huā	a cluster of flowers

Imposing natural or architectural structures

一座山	yī zuò shān	a mountain/hill
一座塔	yī zuò tǎ	a tower/pagoda
一座桥	yī zuò qiáo	a bridge

(Also for: 坟 **fén** ‘tomb’, 水库 **shuǐkù** ‘reservoir’, 宫殿 **gōngdiàn** ‘palace’, 楼房 **lóufáng** ‘storeyed building’, 大厦 **dàshà** ‘mansion’.)

For buildings, the following are also commonly used:

所 **suǒ**: for those with institutional association
 间 **jiān**: for smaller constructions, e.g. rooms, etc.
 家²⁸ **jiā**: for enterprises, etc.
 栋 **dòng** and 幢 **zhuàng**, as well as 所 **suǒ**: for houses

²⁸ 家 **jiā** and 间 **jiān** can in fact be used interchangeably, and they may replace all other measure words for buildings with specific functions.

For example:

一所学校	yī suǒ xuéxiào	a school
------	-----------------------	----------

(Also for: 医院 **yīyuàn** ‘hospital’.)

一家旅馆	yī jiā lǚguǎn	a hotel
------	----------------------	---------

(Also for: 饭店 **fàndiàn** ‘restaurant’, 商店 **shāngdiàn** ‘shop’, 剧院 **jùyuàn** ‘opera house’, 工厂 **gōngchǎng** ‘factory’, 银行 **yínháng** ‘bank’.)

一间教室	yī jiān jiàoshì	a classroom
------	------------------------	-------------

(Also for: 屋子 **wūzi** ‘room’.)

Vehicles

- 辆 **liàng** or 部 **bù**: for 车 **chē** car
 列 **liè**: for 火车 **huǒchē** train
 艘 **sōu** or 条 **tiáo**: for 船 **chuán** ship or boat
 架 **jià**: for 飞机 **fēijī** aircraft
 顶 **dǐng**: for 轿子 **jiàozǐ** sedan chair

Machines

台²⁹ **tái**, which implies a raised platform or table:

- | | | |
|------|--------------------|-----------|
| 一台机器 | yī tái jīqì | a machine |
| 一台马达 | yī tái mǎdá | a motor |

(Also for: 车床 **chēchuáng** 'lathe', 缝纫机 **féng rèn jī** 'sewing-machine', 收音机 **shōuyīnjī** 'radio', 仪器 **yíqì** 'instrument; apparatus'.)

²⁹ 台 **tái** may always be used interchangeably with 架 **jià** 'frame; shelf' in the context of machines. Sometimes, 部 **bù** can also be used.

Natural or social events

The same written form 场 with two different pronunciations is used for natural or social events: 场 **chǎng** (second tone) for a period or spell of a natural event or condition and 场 **chǎng** (third tone) for social events or recreational or sporting activities. For example:

- | | | |
|------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 一场大雪 | yī cháng dà xuě | a heavy snowfall |
| 一场大病 | yī cháng dà bìng | a (period of) serious illness |
| 一场电影 | yī chǎng diànyǐng | a film show |
| 一场球赛 | yī chǎng qiú sài | a ball game |

Publications, writings, expressions, etc.

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------|--------|
| 一本书 | yī běn shū | a book |
|-----|-------------------|--------|

(Also for: 杂志 **zàzhì** 'magazine', 期刊 **qīkān** 'journal', or any publication that is bound into a volume.)

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------|--------|
| 一首诗 | yī shǒu shī | a poem |
|-----|--------------------|--------|

(Also for: 歌 **gē** 'song'.)

一阕词	yī què cí	a ci poem
一篇文章	yī piān wénzhāng	a piece of writing, an essay
一出戏	yī chū xì	an opera/a play
一句话	yī jù huà	a few words/a sentence
一声谢谢	yī shēng xièxie	a word of thanks

Articles of clothing

For garments worn on the upper part of the body or on the whole body, 件 jiàn is the measure word:

一件衬衫	yī jiàn chènshān	a shirt
一件外套	yī jiàn wàitào	a jacket
一件毛衣	yī jiàn máoyī	a woollen sweater
一件大衣	yī jiàn dàyī	an overcoat

For garments worn on the lower part of the body, 条 tiáo is normally used:

一条裤子	yī tiáo kùzi	a pair of trousers
一条裙子	yī tiáo qúnzi	a skirt

Accessories have individual measure words:

一条围巾	yī tiáo wéijīn	a scarf
一条领带	yī tiáo lǐngdài	a tie
一顶帽子	yī dǐng màozi	a hat/cap
一副手套	yī fù shǒutào	a pair of gloves
一双鞋	yī shuāng xié	a pair of shoes

Abstract notions

In Chinese, abstract notions may be seen as either categories or types and the measures used are generally 种 zhǒng 'kind', 类 lèi 'category', 样 yàng 'type':

一种哲学	yī zhǒng zhéxué	a kind of philosophy
这类角色	zhèi lèi juésè	this kind of role
各样功课	gè yàng gōngkè	different school subjects

2.8.2.3 Action-oriented

A number of nouns derive their measure words from the actions or activities associated with them. For example:

一服药	yī fú yào a dose of medicine	(服 fú to take medicine)
一封信	yī fēng xìn a letter	(封 fēng to seal)
一发子弹	yī fā zǐ dàn a bullet	(发 fā to fire; to discharge)
一卷软片	yī juǎn ruǎn piàn a roll of film	(卷 juǎn to roll)

(Also for: 手纸 **shǒuzhǐ** 'toilet paper', 铺盖 **pūgài** 'bedding'.)

一捆柴	yī kǔn chái a bundle of firewood	(捆 kǔn to tie up)
一包糖	yī bāo táng a packet of sweets	(包 bāo to wrap up)
一撮盐	yī cuō yán a pinch of salt	(撮 cuō to pick up between the thumb and the first finger)
一把沙	yī bǎ shā a handful of sand	(把 bǎ to hold; grasp)
一捧枣儿	yī pěng zǎo er a double handful of dates	(捧 pěng to carry in both hands)
一抱草	yī bào cǎo an armful of hay	(抱 bào to hug; embrace)
一担水	yī dàn shuǐ a shoulder pole of water – with a bucket hanging at the two ends	(担 dān to carry on a shoulder pole)
一贴膏药	yī tiē gāo yào a piece of (medicated) plaster	(贴 tiē to stick; glue)
一堵墙	yī dǔ qiáng a wall	(堵 dǔ to block up)
一任首相	yī rèn shǒu xiàng a period of office as prime minister	(任 rèn to assume a post)

Location measure words come in many forms, in that they identify the actual location involved:

一身泥	yī shēn ní the whole body covered in mud (lit. a body of mud)
一脸汗	yī liǎn hàn a face dripping with sweat
一顶帽子	yī dǐng màozi a hat/cap (lit. a crown of hat)
一手墨水	yī shǒu mòshuǐ the whole hand covered in ink (lit. a handful of ink)
一下巴胡子	yī xiàba húzi a hairy chin (lit. a chin of beard)
一鼻子灰	yī bízi huī a nose covered with dirt
一嘴油	yī zuǐ yóu a mouth (lips) covered with grease
一口黄牙	yī kǒu huángyá a mouthful of stained/yellow teeth
一肚子坏	yī dùzi huài a bellyful of bad ideas
一地水	yī dì shuǐ water all over the floor/ground (lit. a floor of water)
一桌子菜	yī zhuōzi cài a table laden with food
一席酒	yī xí jiǔ a banquet (lit. a tableful of wine)
一柜子衣服	yī guizi yīfu a cabinet full of clothes
一树花	yī shù huā a tree covered in blossoms
一池荷花	yī chí héhuā a pond of lotus flowers
一处名胜	yī chù míngshèng a scenic spot (lit. a place of scenery)

2.8.2.5 Metaphor-oriented

A number of measure words are associated with more abstract and descriptive notions. These metaphorical measures occur only with the numeral 一 *yī* 'one'. For example:

一线希望	yī xiàn xīwàng a ray/gleam of hope
一团漆黑	yī tuán qīhēi complete darkness (lit. a ball/lump of darkness)
一派新气象	yī pài xīn qìxiàng a new and dynamic atmosphere
一片欢腾	yī piàn huānténg a scene of rejoicing
一泓流水	yī hóng liúshuǐ a stream of flowing water
一把年纪	yī bǎ niànjì a good age
一股劲儿	yī gǔ jìn a burst of energy
一丝笑意	yī sī xiàoyì a hint of a smile

2.9 Measure words and other attributives

To convert a cardinally numbered item into an ordinal one, 第 *dì* is added before the numeral and measure word.³⁰ For example:

一个人 yī ge rén	>	第一个人 dì yī ge rén
a person; one person		the first person
两个人 liǎng ge rén	>	第二个人 ³¹ dì èr ge rén
two persons		the second person

³⁰ See §2.2.

³¹ 第 *dì* as an indicator of 'sequence' can be used only with 二 *èr* and not 两 *liǎng*.

When words like 这 *zhè* 'this', 那 *nà* 'that', 每 *měi* 'every', 某 *mǒu* 'certain', 哪 *nǎ* 'which', etc. are used with numbers, they are placed before the numeral and measure phrase. If the numeral is 一 *yī* 'one', it is usually dropped. For example:

this person	这个人	zhèi ge rén
that person	那个人	nèi ge rén
every person	每个人	měi ge rén

a certain person 某个人
which person? 哪个人

mǒu ge rén
něi ge rén

However, when numerals other than 一 *yī* 'one' are involved, they obviously cannot be omitted:

这四个苹果	zhè sì ge píngguǒ ³²	these four apples
那五个杯子	nà wǔ ge bēizi	those five cups/mugs/glasses
每两个月	měi liǎng ge yuè	every other month
某两个人	mǒu liǎng ge rén	two certain persons
哪三个人?	nǎ sān ge rén	Which three people?

³² So far, we have seen that 这 *zhè* 'this', 那 *nà* 'that', and 哪 *nǎ* 'which?' are annotated respectively as *zhèi*, *nèi* and *něi*. This is because they have appeared all the time before a measure word that should have been preceded by 一 *yī* 'one' that has been abbreviated. This invisible numeral has in fact affected their pronunciation through assimilation. Now that they are followed by other numerals, they naturally return to their respective inherent pronunciation. However, there are speakers, mainly from north China, who prefer *zhèi*, *nèi* and *něi* in all contexts.

When descriptive adjectives form part of the attributive to a noun qualified by a 'numeral + measure word' phrase, they go between the 'numeral + measure word' phrase and the noun. For example:

这本书	zhèi běn shū this book
这本新书	zhèi běn xīn shū this new book
一个姑娘	yī ge gūniang a girl
一个漂亮的姑娘	yī ge piàoliang de gūniang a pretty girl
那个年轻人	nèi ge niánqīng rén that young man/woman
那个勇敢的年轻人	nèi ge yǒnggǎn de niánqīng rén that brave young man/woman

Verbal attributives, on the other hand, either go between the 'numeral + measure word' phrase and the noun or precede the whole phrase altogether. For example:

每个学生	měi ge xuésheng every student
------	---

每个不会用电脑的学生

**měi ge bù huì yòng diànnǎo
de xuésheng**

every student who can't use a computer

不会用电脑的每个学生

**bù huì yòng diànnǎo de měi ge
xuésheng**

every student who can't use a computer

两个老师

liǎng ge lǎoshī

two teachers

两个新来的老师

liǎng ge xīn lái de lǎoshī

two teachers who have newly arrived

新来的两个老师

xīn lái de liǎng ge lǎoshī

two teachers who have newly arrived

八家商店

bā jiā shāngdiàn

eight shops

八家卖衣服的商店

bā jiā mài yīfu de shāngdiàn

eight shops that sell clothes

卖衣服的八家商店

mài yīfu de bā jiā shāngdiàn

eight shops that sell clothes

一个家庭

yī ge jiāting

a family

一个夫妻经常吵架的家庭

**yī ge fūqī jīngcháng chǎojià de
jiāting**

a family in which the husband and wife
often quarrel

夫妻经常吵架的一个家庭

**fūqī jīngcháng chǎojià de yī ge
jiāting**

a family in which the husband and wife
often quarrel

In fact, the longer the attributive, the more likely it is for the 'numeral + measure' phrase to go closer to its headword, rather than follow the normal 'numeral + measure word + attributive + headword sequence'.

2.10 Reduplication of measure words

Measure words may often be reduplicated to mean plurality, profusion or exclusiveness. For example:

条条大路通罗马。

tiáo tiáo dàlù tōng luómǎ

All roads lead to Rome.

个个都有责任。

gè gè dōu yǒu zérèn

Everybody bears responsibility.

These reduplications may be preceded by the numeral — *yī* ‘one’ to mean ‘every’ and may be used attributively like a ‘numeral + measure word’ phrase:

一朵朵花	yī duǒ duǒ huā	every single flower
一门门课程	yī mén mén kèchéng	each and every course
一个个旅客	yī gè gè lǚkè	every passenger

The attributive indicator 的 *de* may also be included after the reduplication to mean ‘many’:

一座座的桥	yī zuò zuò de qiáo	many a bridge
一台台的电脑	yī tái tái de diànnǎo	many computers

Reduplication of measure words together with their attached numeral — *yī* ‘one’, however, means ‘one after another’:

一个一个地 ³³	yī gè yī gè de	one after another
一步一步地	yī bù yī bù de	step by step
一口一口地	yī kǒu yī kǒu de	mouthful after mouthful

³³ 地 *de* is a particle used to mark descriptive adverbials. See §9.2.

2.11 Missing measure words

Measure words, as we have seen, must accompany any noun associated with a numeral. However, sometimes measure words may seem to be missing from certain structures. One possibility is that the noun itself may be a measure. For example:

一个人	yī ge rén	one person (where 人 rén is a noun)
一人	yī rén	one person (where 人 rén is a measure)

For example:

一人船	yī rén chuán	a one-man boat
一个星期	yī ge xīngqī	one week (where 星期 xīngqī is a noun)
一星期	yī xīngqī	one week (where 星期 xīngqī is a measure)

For example:

一星期假期	yī xīngqī jiàqī	a one-week holiday
-------	------------------------	--------------------

There is some ambiguity with temporal nouns. Some of them are only nouns, some may be both nouns and measures, while others may be only used as measures:

一个小时	yī ge xiǎoshí one hour (where 小时 xiǎoshí is a noun)
一小时	yī xiǎoshí one hour (where 小时 xiǎoshí is a measure)
一个钟头	yī ge zhōngtóu (colloq.) one hour (钟头 zhōngtóu can only be used as a noun)
*一钟头	* yī zhōngtóu *one hour
*一个天 ³⁴	* yī ge tiān *one day (天 tiān is normally used only as a measure)
一天	yī tiān one day
一个礼拜	yī ge lǐbài (colloq.) one week (礼拜 lǐbài is used only as a noun)
*一礼拜	* yī lǐbài *one week
*一周	* yī ge zhōu *one week (周 zhōu can be used only as a measure)
一周	yī zhōu (formal) one week
一个月	yī ge yuè one month (where 月 yuè is a noun)
一月	yī yuè January (where 月 yuè is still a noun)
*一个年 ³⁵	* yī ge nián *one year
一年	yī nián one year (where 年 nián is a measure)

³⁴ 天 **tiān** may sometimes be used as a noun when qualified by an attributive, e.g. 一个大晴天 **yī ge dà qíngtiān** 'a bright sunny day'.

³⁵ 年 **nián** to indicate period of time may be used only as a measure. The exception is the expression 给你拜个年 **gěi nǐ bài ge nián** 'wish you a Happy New Year', where it is a noun.

Another situation, where a measure word seems to be missing, is in quadrisyllabic expressions and established idioms. As the use of measure words is a relatively recent development in the history of the language, it is not unusual that in expressions derived from Classical Chinese, one finds numerals directly associated with nouns. For example:

一事无成 **yī shì wú chéng**

(lit. one thing without success) to have accomplished nothing

一蟹不如一蟹 **yī xiè bùrú yī xiè**

(lit. one crab smaller than another crab) each one is worst than the last

一叶障目，不见泰山 **yī yè zhàng mù | bù jiàn tàishān**

(lit. one leaf screens one's eye, one does not see Mount Tai)

one's view of the important is obscured by the trivial

三言两语 **sānyán liǎngyǔ**

(lit. three words, two expressions) in a few words

五湖四海 **wǔhú sìhǎi**

(lit. five lakes, four seas) all corners of the world

A speaker/writer of the language can create expressions modelled on this omission pattern:

(a) when using 一 **yī** 'one' with a quadrisyllabic rhythm:

这一问题

zhèi yī wèntí

this problem

某一特点

mǒu yī tèdiǎn

a certain characteristic

另一要求³⁶

lìng yī yāoqiú

another request/demand

哪一方面?

nǎi yī fāngmiàn

Which aspect?

³⁶ If the quadrisyllabic rhythm is not adhered to, the necessary measure word needs to be supplied, e.g. 另外一个要求 **lìngwài yī ge yāoqiú**.

(b) when using 那 **nèi** or 这 **zhèi** in colloquial speech without 一 **yī**:

这年纪

zhèi niánjì

at this age

那事儿

nèi shìr

as far as that matter is concerned

On the other hand, the numeral 一 **yī** 'one' is usually omitted before a measure word and a noun that is the object of a monosyllabic verb: e.g. 买本书 **mǎi běn shū** 'to buy a book' instead of 买一本书 **mǎi yī běn shū** or 喝一杯酒 **hē bēi jiǔ** 'to drink a glass of wine' instead of 喝一杯酒 **hē yī bēi jiǔ**.³⁷

³⁷ See Chapter 26 on Prosody and Syntax.

2.12 Disyllabic measure words

The number of measure words in Chinese is approximately 450, half of which are in common use. By far the great majority of them, as we have seen, are monosyllabic, but a small number of established or ad hoc disyllabic measure words are used in colloquial speech. For example:

一嘟噜葡萄	yī dūlu pútáo	(colloq.) a bunch of grapes
一疙瘩糕儿	yī gēda gāor	(colloq.) a small piece of cake
一掐子盐	yī qiāzi yán	(dial.) a pinch of salt

2.13 Compound measure words

Measure words, particularly in technical texts, can appear as compounded measurements. Generally speaking, the compounding usually takes place between an average or universal measure and a duration or frequency measure. The average or standard measure is mentioned first followed immediately by the duration or frequency measure. For example:

人次	rén-ci	number of [for example] visits from people (within a designated period)
架次	jià-ci	number of flights (within a designated period)
千瓦小时	qiānwǎ xiǎoshí	kilowatts per hour

2.14 Duration and frequency measures

Duration and frequency measures are used in a different way from nominal measures. They will be discussed in full in [Chapter 7](#), which deals with duration and frequency complements.

Chapter 3

Pronouns, pronominals and pro-words

3.1 Personal pronouns

The system of personal pronouns in Modern Standard Chinese is laid out in the following table:

person	singular			plural		
first person				speaker only	speaker and hearer	
	我			我们	咱们	
	wǒ			wǒmen	zánmen	
	'I; me'			'we; us'	'we; us'	
second person	normal	polite				
	你	您		你们		
	nǐ	nín		nǐmen		
	'you'	'you'		'you'		
third person	masculine	feminine	neuter	masculine	feminine	neuter
	他	她	它	你们	他们	它们
	tā	tā	tā	tāmen	tāmen	tāmen
	'he; him'	'she; her'	'it'	'they; them'	'they; them'	'they; them'

We can see that, first, no distinction is made between subject and object cases in the pronominal system in Chinese. For example, 我 wǒ stands for either 'I' or 'me'.

Second, the distinction between the two forms of first person plural 我们 wǒmen and 咱们 zánmen as indicated in the table is not always made by native speakers, particularly those from the south of the country.

Third, the polite form for the second person singular 您 nín is in practice most commonly used in addressing superiors or new acquaintances. There is no corresponding form in the plural, and, therefore, other supplementary

phrases have to be used to convey the kind of politeness intended, e.g. 你们两位 **nǐmen liǎng wèi** ‘you two (honourable sirs)’, etc.

Fourth, in the third person singular, the differentiation between genders appears only in the written script and no attempt is made in the spoken form to register such differences.

The possessive forms corresponding to these pronouns are expressed by adding the particle 的 *de* after the pronouns; and there is no distinction between possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns. For example:

my; mine	我的	wǒde
our; ours (inclusive)	咱们的	zánmende
your; yours	你的	nǐde
your; yours (polite)	您的	nínde
her; hers	她的	tāde
their; theirs (masculine)	他们的	tāmende

这是您的茶。 **zhè shì nín de chá**
This is your tea. (possessive adjective)

这封信是您的。 **zhè fēng xìn shì nín de**
This letter is yours. (possessive pronoun)

3.2 Demonstrative pronouns

In Modern Standard Chinese, there are only two sets of demonstrative pronouns in common use:

close to the speaker	away from the speaker
这 zhè ‘this’ 这儿 zhèr or 这里 zhèlǐ ‘here’	那 nà ‘that’ 那儿 nàr or 那里 nàlǐ ‘there’

For example:

这是我的。 zhè shì wǒ de	This is mine.
那是你的。 nà shì nǐ de	That is yours.

These two demonstrative pronouns on their own can be used only in the topic¹ position. When they function as demonstrative adjectives, they

¹ The forms of topic–comment sentences as opposed to subject–predicate sentences are discussed in [Chapter 19](#).

combine with measure words or ‘numeral + measure’ phrases and like other pronouns can then occur in any position in a sentence:

这(一)个	zhèi (yī) gè this one
这两个	zhè/zhèi liǎng gè these two
这(一)些	zhèi (yī) xiē these
那(一)本	nèi (yī) běn that copy
那几本	nà/nèi jǐ běn those few copies
那(一)些	nèi (yī) xiē those
我买那两个。	wǒ mǎi nà/nèi liǎng gè I'd like to buy those two.
我不要这几本。	wǒ bù yào zhè/zhèi jǐ běn I don't want these few copies.
我对那些不感兴趣。	wǒ duì nèixiē bù gǎn xìngqù I'm not interested in those.

Note that 这 ‘this’ and 那 ‘that’ are always pronounced respectively as **zhè** and **nà** when used as demonstrative pronouns on their own. However, as demonstrative adjectives, when they are followed by a measure, they are also pronounced **zhèi** and **nèi** by many speakers. This is almost certainly a phonetic fusion of **zhè** + **yī** ‘one’ and **nà** + **yī** ‘one’. Even when **yī** ‘one’ is present in its own right in an utterance, the pronunciation **zhèi** and **nèi** can still be used. For example:

这(一)件大衣	zhèi (yī) jiàn dàyī	this overcoat
那(一)天	nèi (yī) tiān	that day

It also naturally follows that 这些 ‘these’ and 那些 ‘those’ are pronounced **zhèixiē** and **nèixiē**, since the plural measure 些 **xiē** ‘some’ is itself used only with the measure 一 **yī** ‘one’.²

² See §1.3.

The location words ‘here’ and ‘there’ are also based on the two demonstratives:

here	这儿	zhèr	or	这里	zhèli
there	那儿	nàr	or	那里	nàli

这儿/这里有牛奶。	zhèr/zhèli yǒu niúnnǎi Here is some milk.
你的书包在那儿/那里。	nǐde shūbāo zài nàr/nàli Your schoolbag is over there.

Finally, there are a number of demonstratives (used both as pronouns and adjectives) that occur as established words, expressions, idioms or sayings.³ These expressions are more literary than colloquial.

this	此	cǐ	此外	cǐwài apart from this
			此地/此处	cǐdì/cǐchù this place; here
			此刻	cǐkè this moment; now
			从此	cóngcǐ since then; from now on
			由此	yóucǐ from here
	斯	sī	斯人	sī rén (fml.) this person
	者	zhě	者番	zhě fān (obs.) on this occasion
that	彼	bǐ	彼时	bǐ shí (fml.) at that time
	其	qí	其时	qí shí (fml.) just at that time
this or that	是	shì	如是	rúshì (fml.) like this
			是日	shìrì (fml.) that day
	该	gāi	该校	gāi xiào (fml.) this or that school

³ These demonstratives, being classical in origin, do not occur with measure words and are followed immediately by nouns.

In writings that adopt a more formal tone, 此 **cǐ** ‘this; here’ and 该 **gāi** ‘that; the said; the above-mentioned’ are still commonly used:

formal in tone	colloquial equivalent	English
此地/此处 cǐdì/cǐchù	这儿/这里 zhèr/zhèli	in this place
此事 cǐshì	这件事儿 zhèi jiàn shìr	this matter
该项工作 gāi xiàng gōngzuò	那项工作 nèi xiàng gōngzuò	that job
该地区 gāi dìqū	那个地区 nèi ge dìqū	that area

3.3 Interrogative pronouns

	English	Chinese
human beings	who/whom	谁 shuí or (colloq.) shéi
inanimate objects	what	什么 shénme
human beings or inanimate objects	which	哪 nǎ/něi + measure word
one of an ordered closed set	which	几 jǐ (+ measure word)
place	where ⁴	哪儿/哪里 nǎr/nǎli

⁴ Though ‘where’ is an interrogative adverb in English, 哪儿 **nǎr** in Chinese is a pronoun, e.g. 你上哪儿去? **nǐ shàng nǎr qù** (lit. you to where go) ‘Where are you off to?’.

From the table, we can see that there are only two interrogative pronouns 谁 **shuí** (or **shéi**) and 什么 **shénme**, and that there is no case differentiation with 谁 **shuí**.

谁不去?	shuí/shéi bù qù	Who is not going?
你找谁?	nǐ zhǎo shuí/shéi	Whom are you looking for?
这是什么?	zhè shì shénme	What is this?
你要什么?	nǐ yào shénme	What do you want?

谁 **shuí/shéi** may of course be turned into a possessive pronoun or adjective by the addition of 的 **de**:

这本书是谁的?	zhèi běn shū shì shuíde/shéide	Whose is this book?
这是谁的书?	zhè shì shuíde/shéide shū	Whose book is this?

什么 **shénme** may also be used as an interrogative adjective:⁵

你喜欢听什么音乐?	nǐ xǐhuan tīng shénme yīnyuè
	What music do you like listening to?
你什么时候走?	nǐ shénme shíhou zǒu
	What time are you leaving?

⁵ When 什么 **shénme** is used as an interrogative adjective, it can be linked with human nouns to connote contempt: e.g. 你是什么人? **nǐ shì shénme rén** 'Who/What are you?', 什么积极分子! **shénme jījī fēnzǐ** 'What an activist!', etc.

On the other hand, 哪 **nǎ/něi** is an interrogative adjective that is always used in conjunction with an appropriate measure word or 'measure + noun' phrase (preceded or not preceded by a numeral) to form an interrogative pronominal expression meaning 'which one/two/etc'. Here are some examples:

哪(一)天?	nǎ/něi (yī) tiān ⁶	Which day?
哪(一)年?	nǎ/něi (yī) nián	Which year?
哪(一)件?	nǎ/něi (yī) jiàn	Which jacket/shirt/coat/, etc.?
哪本书?	nǎ/něi běn shū	Which book?
哪两支笔?	nǎ/[něi] liǎng zhī bǐ	Which two pens?
哪些椅子?	nǎ/něi xiē yǐzi	Which chairs?
哪条裤子?	nǎ/něi tiáo kùzi	Which pair of trousers?
哪班飞机?	nǎ/něi bān fēijī	Which flight?
哪个大夫?	nǎ/něi ge dàifu	Which doctor?

⁶ As with **zhè/zhèi** 'this' and **nà/nèi** 'that' above, 哪 **nǎ** followed by 一 **yī** may also be pronounced as **něi**.

As we can see, 哪 **nǎ/něi** is used to single out a particular one or number from an unlimited group of people or things. If the selection is made from an ordered and closed set of items, 几 **jǐ** is often used instead. For example:

哪(一)天	nǎ/něi (yī) tiān	Which day of the month?
= 几号	jǐ hào ⁷	
哪个月	nǎ/něi ge yuè	Which month?
= 几月	jǐ yuè	

⁷ Please note, however, that the answer to 哪(一)天 **nǎ/něi (yī) tiān** may for instance be (a) today, (b) Tuesday or (c) 21st, while to 几号 **jǐ hào**, the answer can be only 21st; likewise, the answer to 哪个月 **nǎ/něi ge yuè** is either (a) this month or (b) May, but to 几月 **jǐ yuè**, it can be only May.

哪(一)年	nǎ/něi (yī) nián	Which year? ⁸
几时	jǐ shí	What time (i.e. which hour, day, etc.) ⁹
几点(钟)	jǐ diǎn (zhōng)	What time (i.e. which hour)?
几年级	jǐ niánjí	Which year (in a school, etc.)?
几号房	jǐ hào fáng	Which room?/ What number room?
第几	dì jǐ	What place (in a race, exam, etc.)?

⁸ As 年 **nián** ‘year’ is an open set, it is therefore not usually used with 几 **jǐ**.

⁹ 时 **shí** ‘time’ is not normally used on its own but often occurs with 几 **jǐ** to form a disyllabic expression 几时 **jǐshí** meaning ‘which hour, day, month’ etc. in general terms, equivalent to its quadrisyllabic counterpart 什么时候 **shénme shíhou** ‘what time’.

哪儿 **nǎr** has an alternative form in 哪里 **nǎli**, which is commonly used by southern speakers:

你去哪儿/哪里?	nǐ qù nǎr/nǎli	Where are you going?
他在哪儿/哪里?	tā zài nǎr/nǎli	Where is he?
哪儿/哪里有厕所?	nǎr/nǎli yǒu cèsuǒ	Where is there a toilet?

3.4 Indefinite pronouns

By indefinite pronouns, we mean words like ‘everybody’, ‘anybody’, ‘nobody’, ‘everything’, ‘anything’, ‘nothing’, and so on. In Chinese, these pronouns are created by using the appropriate interrogative word¹⁰ in conjunction with a reference adverb, either 都 **dōu** ‘all’ or 也 **yě** ‘also’:

谁都/也	shuí/shéi dōu/yě	everyone, anyone
什么都/也	shénme dōu/yě	everything, anything
哪个都/也	nǎ/něi ge dōu/yě	all, any
哪儿/哪里都/也	nǎr/nǎli dōu/yě	everywhere, anywhere

¹⁰ In these constructions, the interrogative pronoun becomes indefinite: 谁 **shuí/shéi** ‘who(m)ever’, 什么 **shénme** ‘whatever’, 哪个 **nǎ ge/něi ge** ‘whichever’ and 哪儿/哪里 **nǎr/nǎli** ‘wherever’.

They generally occur in the topic position, that is at the beginning of an expository or evaluative sentence,¹¹ and they can be followed by either a positive or a negative comment:

谁都认识他。	shuí/shéi dōu rènshi tā Everybody knows him.
谁都不喜欢他。	shuí/shéi dōu bù xǐhuan tā Nobody likes him.
什么都行。	shénme dōu xíng Anything will do.
(我)什么都吃。	(wǒ) shénme dōu chī I eat everything.
(我)什么也不要。	(wǒ) shénme yě bù yào I do not want anything.
(我)哪件也不买。	(wǒ) nǎ/něi jiàn yě bù mǎi I am not going to buy any (of these clothes).
(我)哪儿/哪里都不去。	(wǒ) nǎr/nǎli dōu bù qù I am not going anywhere.

¹¹ See Chapter 20.

As happens with its interrogative usage, the addition of 的 *de* to the indefinite pronoun 谁 **shuí/shéi** ‘whoever’ converts it to an indefinite possessive 谁的 **shuíde/shéide** ‘whose’. For example:

谁的都没有关系。
shuí/shéide dōu méiyǒu guānxi
It does not matter whose it is.

However, if these Chinese indefinite pronouns are used in any other than the topic position in a sentence, the sentence generally takes the form of a dependent clause followed by, or embedded in, another larger and independent construction:

见到谁，请替我问候一声。
jiàndào shuí | qǐng tì wǒ wèn hòu yī shēng
Please remember me to anyone you come across.

我肚子一饿，就想吃点儿什么。
wǒ dùzi yī è | jiù xiǎng chī diǎnr shénme
I like to have something to eat as soon as I feel hungry.

去哪儿都行。
qù nǎ dōu xíng
(I'll) go wherever it is/(I) don't mind where (we) go.

Very often, the same indefinite pronoun is used in a similar position in two clauses within a sentence, the second echoing the first:

有什么，吃什么。

yǒu shénme | chī shénme

(lit. have what, eat what) I'll eat whatever you've got.

你去哪儿，我就去哪儿。

nǐ qù nǎr | wǒ jiù qù nǎr

(lit. you go where, I then go where) I'll go wherever you go.

谁弄错，谁负责。

shuí nòng cuò | shuí fùzé

(lit. who gets wrong, who is responsible)

Whoever makes a mistake will be responsible.

他跟谁好，我也跟谁好。

tā gēn shuí hǎo | wǒ yě gēn shuí hǎo

(lit. he with whom good, I also with whom good)

I'll be nice to anyone he is nice to.

你帮谁，我就帮谁。

nǐ bāng shuí | wǒ jiù bāng shuí

(lit. you help whom, I then help whom) I'll help anyone you help.

One important thing to note about these interrogatives-turned-indefinite pronouns is that, while their interrogative originals are always stressed in a sentence, as indefinites they never are.

3.5 Enumerative pronouns

By enumerative pronouns, we mean fixed pronominal expressions used in Chinese that are similar to 'etc.' or 'and so on (and so forth)' in English:

他在超市买了一些水果，如梨、苹果、橘子，等等。

tā zài chāoshì mǎi le yīxiē shuǐguǒ | rú lí | píngguǒ | júzi |

děngdeng

He bought some fruit, such as pears, apples, oranges, etc. at the supermarket.

where 等等 **děngdeng** 'etc, and the like' is an enumerative pronoun indicating a thing or things of a similar kind in a list that remains open.

Indefinite pronouns also sometimes occur as enumerative pronouns when they are reduplicated and integrated into an object clause. For example,

他说老王、老张，还有谁(谁)也没有去。

tā shuō lǎowáng | lǎozhāng | háiyǒu shuí shuí (shuí)/shéi shéi (shéi) yě méiyǒu qù

He said Old Wang, Old Zhang and various other people had not gone either.

他认为他不但懂天文、地理、数学，还懂别的什么什么的。

tā rènwéi tā bùdàn dǒng tiānwén | dìlǐ | shùxué | hái dǒng biéde shénme shénme de

She thought he understood not only astronomy, geography and mathematics but also all other kinds of things.

3.6 Pronominals

Pronominals are words or phrases that function like pronouns. The most common type is either a ‘numeral + measure’ phrase on its own or an attributive followed by 的 *de*. Take the following noun phrase:

两件红色的外套

liǎng jiàn hóngsè de wàitào
two red jackets

Enquiries deriving from it about the number and/or colour of the jackets might invite the following pronominal responses:

我买了两件。

wǒ mǎi le liǎng jiàn
I bought two.

我买了红色的。

wǒ mǎi le hóngsè de
I bought the red ones.

我买了两件红色的。

wǒ mǎi le liǎng jiàn hóngsè de
I bought two red ones.

两件 *liǎng jiàn*, as a ‘numeral + measure’ phrase and 红色的 *hóngsè de*, as an attributive with 的 *de*, both represent their associated noun 外套 *wàitào* ‘jacket’ in this context, and are both pronominals. We will look at some other examples in different contexts:

At a fruit stall selling mandarin oranges:

你买几斤? **nǐ mǎi jǐ jīn**

(lit. you buy how many catties) How many catties do you want?

我买三斤。 **wǒ mǎi sān jīn**

(lit. I buy three catties) I'd like to have three catties, (please).

你要大的还是小的? **nǐ yào dà de hái shì xiǎo de**

(lit. you want big **de** or small **de**) Do you want big ones or small ones?

我要中等的。 **wǒ yào zhōngděng de**

(lit. I want medium **de**) I'd like the medium-sized ones.

A scene on the beach:

海滩上有很多人。 有的在晒太阳; 有的要么跑着, 跳着, 要么在玩沙子。

hǎitān shàng yǒu hěnduō rén || yǒude zài shài tàiyáng | yǒude yàome pǎo zhe | tiào zhe | yàome zài wán shāzi ||

There are a lot of people on the beach, some sun-bathing, others running, jumping or playing with the sand.

晒太阳的大半是大人。 跑着、跳着或者在玩沙子的大多是小孩。

shài tàiyáng de dàbàn shì dàrén | pǎo zhe | tiào zhe huòzhě zài wán shāzi de dàduō shì xiǎohái ||

Those sun-bathing are mostly adults while those running, jumping or playing with the sand are mostly children.

卖冰激凌的车一来, 那些跑着、跳着, 在玩沙子的马上停下来, 蜂拥而上, 团团围住卖冰激凌的, 使他忙得喘不过气来。

mài bīngjīlíng de chē yī lái | nèixiē pǎo zhe | tiào zhe | zài wán shāzi de mǎshàng tíng xiàlai | fēngyōng ér shàng | tuántuán wéizhù mài bīngjīlíng de, shǐ tā máng de chuǎn bu guò qì lái ||

As soon as the ice-cream van arrives, those running, jumping or playing with the sand immediately stop what they are doing and swarm around the ice-cream man in a tight circle, making him so busy he can't get his breath.

It must, however, be remembered that 的 **de** pronominals always imply a contrast, whether the original forms are adjectival or verbal. In the case of adjectival pronominals, one may, say, for example:

大的	dà de	a big one
最大的	zuì dà de	the biggest one

but never:

*很大的	hěn dà de	*very big one
*大大的	dàdà de	*biggish one

3.7 Pro-words

Apart from the rule-governed ad hoc pronominals, there are a number of established **pro-words** in the lexicon. They are items that are often used to replace other words or expressions. One common set takes the place of personal pronouns:

person	singular or plural		plural	
	formal	colloquial	formal	colloquial
first person	自己 ¹² zìjǐ 'oneself'	自个儿 zìgěr 'oneself'		
second person			诸位 zhūwèi 'everyone here' 各位 gèwèi 'everyone here'	大家 dàjiā 'everybody' 大伙儿 dàhuǒr 'everyone'
third person	别人 biérén 'others' 前者 qiánzhě ¹³ 'the former' 后者 hòuzhě 'the latter'	人家 rénjia ¹⁴ 'others'		

¹² 自己 **zìjǐ** and 自个儿 **zìgěr** may also be used as emphatic pronouns, e.g. 我自己 **wǒ zìjǐ** 'I myself', 他们自个儿 **tāmen zìgěr** 'they themselves', etc.

¹³ 前者 **qiánzhě** and 后者 **hòuzhě** are somewhat formal and are generally used to refer to inanimate objects rather than animate beings.

¹⁴ 人家 **rénjia** normally indicates a third party, e.g. 把书送给人家 **bǎ shū sòng gěi rénjia** 'Give the book to him (her, them) (as a gift)', 别老(是)说人家的不是 **bié lǎo(shì) shuō rénjia de búshì** 'Don't keep on talking about his/her/their fault(s)'; however, it may sometimes be used to refer to the speaker him- or herself, that is, referring to oneself as if one is a third party when discussing or arguing with somebody, e.g. 他让人家生气了 **tā ràng rénjia shēngqì le** 'He made me angry', 别老是打断人家的话, 行吗? **bié lǎoshì dǎduàn rénjia de huà lǐ xíng ma?** 'Don't keep interrupting what I say, all right?'

The possessive forms of these pro-words are formulated in the same way as personal pronouns by adding the particle 的 **de**:

自己的	zìjǐ de	one's own
大家的	dàjiā de	everybody's

Here are some sentence examples:

自己不愿意做，就别叫别人做。

zìjǐ bù yuànyì zuò | jiù bié jiào biérén zuò

Don't ask others to do what you are unwilling to do yourself.

请大家安静点儿。 **qǐng dàjiā ānjìng diǎnr**

Please (would everyone) be a bit quiet.

人家的事儿你别管。 **rénjia de shìr nǐ bié guǎn**

Don't poke your nose into other people's affairs. (i.e. Mind your own business.)

The pro-word 怎么样 **zěnmeyàng** is generally used as an interrogative, asking about present or future conditions. It often constitutes the whole of a predicate. For example:

你今天怎(么)样?

nǐ jīntiān zěnmeyàng

How are you today?

你明天怎(么)样?

nǐ míngtiān zěnmeyàng

What are you doing tomorrow?

今天的电影怎(么)样?

jīntiān de diànyǐng zěnmeyàng

How was today's film?

你怎(么)样?

nǐ zěnmeyàng

How about you?

你怎(么)样了?

nǐ zěnmeyàng le

What's wrong with you?

我没怎(么)样。

wǒ méi zěnmeyàng

There's nothing wrong with me.¹⁵

¹⁵ A speaker, in responding to a question, will often borrow or repeat a phrase in this way from the question.

It is also used as a pronoun or an adverb:

咱们歇一会儿，你说怎(么)样?

zánmen xiē yīhuìr | nǐ shuō zěnmeyàng

What do you think about our having a rest?

人家怎(么)样说，你就怎(么)样办呗。

rénjia zěnmeyàng shuō | nǐ jiù zěnmeyàng bàn bei

You just do what people say.

Adjectives as attributives and predicatives

4.1 Adjectives in Chinese

Syntactically, adjectives in Chinese may function as **attributives** when placed in front of noun headwords (with or without 的 *de*) (= formulaically: Attr. + Noun); or as **predicatives** when placed behind nominal headwords (with or without 的 *de*) (= formulaically: Noun + Pred.);¹ or even as **adverbials** if placed before verbs (with or without 地 *de*). We will defer the discussion of adjectives functioning as adverbials until [Chapter 9](#). Here, we will concentrate on attributive and predicative uses.

¹ See §4.4 for discussion of the descriptive indicator 的 *de*.

An adjective (e.g. 漂亮 *piàoliang* ‘pretty’) used attributively with a noun headword produces an extended nominal expression:

一条漂亮的裙子 *yī tiáo piàoliang de qúnzi* a pretty skirt

When an adjective is used predicatively with a nominal headword, the result is a clause or sentence:

这条裙子真漂亮。 *zhè tiáo qúnzi zhēn piàoliang*
This skirt is really pretty.

Apart from differences in syntactic function and in syllabicity, which directly affects collocability,² adjectives also differ in many other respects: qualifiers vs quantifiers, gradable vs non-gradable, conditional vs unconditional, derivable vs non-derivable, reduplicable vs non-reduplicable, phonaesthetic vs non-phonaesthetic, derogatory vs commendatory, and so on. These differences, which invariably affect their syntactic capability, are discussed in turn in §§4.2 and 4.6 below.

² Generally speaking, monosyllabic adjectives tend to form words or set expressions and are therefore more restrictive in their collocability, whereas disyllabic adjectives can be used freely as qualifiers (or quantifiers).

4.2 Qualifiers or quantifiers

Adjectives as
attributives
and
predicatives

Adjectives in Chinese are used, like adjectives in other languages, to qualify or quantify³ noun headwords. For example:

好学生	hǎo xuésheng	a good student/good students
许多学生	xǔduō xuésheng	many students

³ The kind of quantification indicated by adjectives is generally rough and imprecise compared with the more precise or specific ‘numeral and measure word’ phrases.

where 好 **hǎo** ‘good’ qualifies and 许多 **xǔduō** ‘many’ quantifies. As we can see, both precede their respective headwords. When they come together to qualify and quantify one and the same headword, the quantifier always comes before the qualifier:⁴

许多好学生	xǔduō hǎo xuésheng	many good students
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⁴ This is similar to noun phrases with a ‘numeral + measure’ and a qualifier, where the former always precedes the latter: e.g. 一个好學生 **yī ge hǎo xuésheng** ‘a good student’, and not *好一个学生 ***hǎo yī ge xuésheng**.

and not:

*好许多学生	* hǎo xǔduō xuésheng	*good many students
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Qualifiers are used freely as either attributives or predicatives, but quantifiers for the most part function only as attributives. For example:

所有问题	suǒyǒu wéntí	all the problems
*问题所有	* wéntí suǒyǒu	
多数人	duōshù rén	the majority of the people
*人多数	* rén duōshù	

The exceptions are 多 **duō** ‘many, much’ and 少 **shǎo** ‘few, little’, which, when duly modified by a degree adverb, may be used predicatively. For example:

很多东西	hěn duō dōngxi	a lot of things
东西很多	dōngxi hěn duō	there are a lot of things (lit. things are (very) many)
不少人	bùshǎo rén	quite a few people
人不少	rén bùshǎo	there are quite a few people (lit. people are quite a few)

Note, however, that this exception does not apply to 许多 *xǔduō* ‘many, a lot of’:

许多朋友	<i>xǔduō péngyou</i>	quite a few friends
*朋友许多	* <i>péngyou xǔduō</i>	*there are quite a few friends

Other common quantifiers include: 大量 *dàliàng* ‘a great deal’, 好些 *hǎoxiē* ‘quite a number’; 个别 *gèbié* ‘individual’, 点滴 *diǎndī* ‘a little’; 一切 *yīqiè* ‘all’, 全部 *quánbù* ‘whole’; 有些 *yǒuxiē* ‘some’, 有的 *yǒude* ‘some’; 多数 *duōshù* ‘majority of’, 少数 *shǎoshù* ‘minority of’; etc.

4.3 Degree adverbs and complements

Degree adverbs and complements occur respectively before and after adjectives to indicate the degree or extent to which the meaning encoded by an adjective is to be ascertained:

这本字典很好。 *zhèi běn zìdiǎn hěn hǎo*

This dictionary is very good. [degree adverb]

这本字典好得很。 *zhèi běn zìdiǎn hǎo de hěn*

This dictionary is really good. [degree complement]

The presence of these degree adverbs and complements removes any implication of contrast that is latent in an unmarked predicative adjective.

If somebody says:

这本字典好。 *zhèi běn zìdiǎn hǎo.* This dictionary is good.

the speaker must be understood to be implying that some other dictionary is not as good as this one. In fact, the degree adverb 很 *hěn* ‘very’, unless it is emphasised, does not really mean ‘very’, and its integration into an adjectival predicative is more often than not to counteract an implication of contrast.

Quantifying adjectives, with the exception of 多 *duō* ‘many’ and 少 *shǎo* ‘few’, do not normally occur with degree adverbs or degree complements. For example:

很许多人	<i>hěn xǔduō rén</i>	quite a number of people
好些得很	<i>hǎoxiē de hěn</i>	quite a few

Qualifying adjectives, on the other hand, as we have just seen, usually do require the modification of degree adverbs.

不重	bù zhòng⁵	not heavy
很美	hěn měi	very pretty
较差	jiào chà	slightly worse
最好	zuì hǎo	best of all (lit. most good)
蛮有趣 ⁶	mán yǒuqù	fairly interesting
非常容易	fēicháng róngyì	extremely easy
有点儿可怜 ⁷	yǒu diǎnr kělián	somewhat pitiable
那么/这么漂亮	nàme/zhème piàoliang	so pretty
多么美丽	duōme měilì	how beautiful

⁵ The negator 不 **bù** ‘not’ modifies its tone to a second when followed by a word of the fourth tone, e.g. 不重 **bù zhòng** ‘not heavy’ as in this example, but remains unchanged when followed by words of other tones. As this is a rule-governed practice, the *pinyin* annotations in this grammar will not reflect this modification.

⁶ 蛮 **mán** ‘fairly’, which occurs mainly in southern dialects of Chinese, is generally used with commendatory terms, e.g. 蛮好 **mán hǎo** ‘fairly good’, but not *蛮坏 **mán huài*** ‘rather bad’.

⁷ There is a tendency for 有点儿 **yǒu diǎnr** ‘somewhat’ to be used only with derogatory terms, e.g. 有点儿难 **yǒu diǎnr nán** ‘somewhat difficult’, but not *有点儿容易 **yǒu diǎnr róngyì*** ‘somewhat easy’.

不 **bù** ‘not’ is both negator and degree adverb. When it is used in conjunction with 很 **hěn** ‘very’, two different meanings are possible depending on word order:

不很好	bù hěn hǎo	not very good
很不好	hěn bù hǎo	very bad

较 **jiào** and 比较 **bǐjiào** ‘comparatively’ indicate a comparative degree and 最 **zuì** ‘most’ a superlative degree. For example:

这个较好。	zhèi ge jiào hǎo	This one is better.
这个比较好。	zhèi ge bǐjiào hǎo	This one is better.
这个最好。	zhèi ge zuì hǎo	This one is the best.

那么 **nàme** ‘so’ is usually used in negative sentences and 多么 **duōme** ‘how’ in exclamatory ones. For example:

我从没见过那么漂亮的孩子。
wǒ cóng méi jiàn guo nàme piàoliang de háizi
I have never seen such a pretty child before.

这儿的风景多么美丽呀！
zhèr de fēngjǐng duōme měilì ya
How beautiful the view is from here!

Other degree adverbs are:

太	tài	真	zhēn
	too		really
更/更加	gèng/gèngjiā	十分	shífēn
	even more		very, extremely
万分	wànfēn	相当	xiāngdāng
	extremely		quite, fairly
特别	tèbié	极其	jíqí
	especially		most, exceedingly
无比	wúbǐ	绝顶	juédǐng
	incomparably		extremely
过分	guòfēn		
	excessively		

Degree complements⁸ follow the adjectives they modify:

好些	hǎoxiē	slightly better
好点儿	hǎo diǎnr	a little better
好得很	hǎo de hěn	really, really good
好得多	hǎo de duō	much/far better
美极了	měi jí le	exceptionally beautiful
糟透了 ⁹	zāo tòu le	thoroughly bad, totally rotten

⁸ For more precise degree complements like 高一公分 **gāo yī gōngfēn** ‘one centimetre taller’, 大两岁 **dà liǎng suì** ‘two years older’, etc., see §4.9.

⁹ 透了 **tòu le** ‘thoroughly, to the core’ tends to occur only with a derogatory meaning, e.g. 坏透了 **huài tòu le** ‘rotten to the core’, but not *好透了 **hǎo tòu le** ‘good to the extreme’.

Other degree complements are:

坏得不得了	高兴得了不得
huài de bùdeliǎo	gāoxìng de liǎobùdé
rotten to the core	exceedingly happy
饿死了 è sǐ le	快乐之极 kuàilè zhī jí
famished (lit. hungry to death)	extremely happy
贵得要命 guì de yàomìng	热得要死 rè de yàosǐ
impossibly expensive	unbearably hot

It must, however, be noted that only qualifying adjectives that are gradable¹⁰ can take degree adverbs or complements. Non-gradable adjectives usually cannot.

¹⁰ For gradable and non-gradable adjectives, see §4.6 below.

For example:

*很男	hěn nán	*very male
*女得很	nǚ de hěn	*extremely female

4.4 The descriptive indicator 的 *de*

The presence of the descriptive indicator 的 *de* in an adjectival phrase depends on factors that are different for quantifying and qualifying adjectives.

Quantifying adjectives are not generally used with the descriptive indicator 的 *de* when they have no more than a quantifying capacity. For example:

许多人	xǔduō rén	many people
广大读者	guǎngdà dúzhě	a large number of general readers
大量信息	dàliàng xìnxī	a large quantity of information
个别地区	gèbié dìqū	individual areas
些许礼物	xiēxiǔ lǐwù	a few presents
全部开支	quánbù kāizhī	total expenditure

However, when a quantifying adjective has a more descriptive than quantifying function, it does incorporate 的 *de*:

无数的事实	wúshù de shìshí	innumerable facts
许许多多 ¹¹ 的人	xǔxǔduōduō de rén	a very many people

¹¹ All reduplicated forms in Chinese are in fact of a descriptive nature.

With qualifying adjectives, on the other hand, the presence of 的 *de* depends on whether the adjective is monosyllabic or polysyllabic. Generally speaking, monosyllabic adjectives have greater collocational restrictions and hence greater structural bonds with the headwords they qualify. They are therefore often placed directly in front of their headwords without 的 *de*.¹²

红砖	hóng zhuān	red bricks
短裤	duǎn kù	shorts (lit. short trousers)
近路	jìn lù	a short-cut (rather than a detour)
热水	rè shuǐ	hot water
新书	xīn shū	a new book/new books
高个子	gāo gèzi	a tall person (lit. tall build/stature)
怪脾气	guài píqi	an odd/eccentric temperament
新房子	xīn fángzi	a new house/new houses
好天气	hǎo tiānqi	good weather

¹² Where the collocation is loose and/or the noun is long, it is possible for a monosyllabic adjective to occur with 的 *de*, e.g. 新的自来水笔 **xīn de zǐláishuǐbǐ** a new fountain pen.

On the other hand, di- or polysyllabic adjectives usually require 的 *de*:

肥沃的土地	féiwò de tǔdì fertile land
幽静的环境	yōujìng de huánjìng quiet surroundings
幸福的生活	xìngfú de shēnghuó a happy life
美丽的焰火	měilì de yànhuǒ beautiful fireworks
凉爽的风	liángshuǎng de fēng a cool breeze
蔚蓝的天空	wèilán de tiānkōng a blue sky
茂密的树林	màomì de shùlín a dense forest
平易近人的老师	píngyì jìnrén de lǎoshī an approachable teacher
无穷无尽的力量	wúqióng wújìn de lìliàng boundless energy/strength
一个聪明伶俐的孩子	yī ge cōngmíng línglì de háizi an intelligent, quick-witted child

All phonaesthetic or reduplicated forms, because of their inbuilt descriptive nature, are also usually followed by 的 *de*:

清清的河水	qīngqīng de héshuǐ a clear stream
蓝蓝的天	lánlán de tiān a blue sky
圆滚滚的卵石	yuángǔngǔn de luǎnshí smooth, round pebbles
白蒙蒙的雾气	báiméngméng de wùqì white haze
绿茸茸的草地	lǜrōngrōng de cǎodì a lush green lawn/meadow
弯弯曲曲的小道	wānwānqūqū de xiǎodào a zigzag path
火热火热的太阳	huǒrè huǒrè de tàiyáng a burning hot sun
一个老老实实的人	yī ge lǎolǎoshíshí de rén an extremely honest person

Monosyllabic adjectives, when modified by degree adverbs, become more descriptive than restrictive, and therefore have to include the indicator:

很大的房子	hěn dà de fángzi	a very big house/very big houses
很脏的衣服	hěn zāng de yīfu	very dirty clothes
很高的评价	hěn gāo de píngjià	a very good appraisal

However, when disyllabic adjectives qualify disyllabic headwords, if the consequential quadrisyllabic rhythm forms a tightly knit expression, then the indicator may often be dropped.¹³ For example:

公共场所	gōnggòng chǎngsuǒ	public places
首要任务	shǒuyóu rènwu	the primary task
根本问题	gēnběn wèntí	the fundamental problem
关键时刻	guānjiàn shíkè	the critical juncture
保守势力	bǎoshǒu shìlì	conservative forces
耐心指导	nàixīn zhǐdǎo	patient guidance

¹³ This does not imply that the indicator 的 *de* must be omitted. It is still grammatical to say 首要的任务 *shǒuyóu de rènwu* ‘the primary task’, etc.

In adjectival predicatives, which, as we have seen, normally incorporate a degree adverb or complement, 的 *de* is not usually present:

这个孩子很高。	zhèi ge háizi hěn gāo This child is tall.
这个学生非常聪明。	zhèi ge xuésheng fēicháng cōngmíng This student is very clever.
那儿的生活写意得很。	nàr de shēnghuó xièyì de hěn Life there is extremely enjoyable.

However, this is not always the case. In the three examples above, the adjective is evaluative, conveying a comment or judgement, but it is also possible for the adjective to be descriptive rather than evaluative. When this is so, 的 *de* is likely to be present:

那个人老老实实的。	nèi ge rén lǎolǎoshíshí de That man is an extremely honest person.
太阳火热火热的。	tàiyáng huǒrè huǒrè de The sun is scorching.
河水清清的。	héshuǐ qīngqīng de The water in the river is crystal clear.

英国的草地一年到头绿茵茵的。

yīngguó de cǎodì yī nián dào tóu lǜyīnyīng de
Lawns in Britain are pleasantly green all the year round.

他整天忙忙碌碌的。

tā zhěngtiān mángmánglùlù de
He is busy doing this or that all day long.

Quadrissyllabic adjectival idioms, whether evaluative or descriptive, in a predicative position uniquely take neither 很 *hěn* nor 的 *de*:

那个孩子聪明伶俐。**nèi ge háizi cōngmíng línglì**
That child is intelligent and quick-witted.

河水清澈见底。**héshuǐ qīngchè jiàndǐ**
The water in the river is crystal clear.

4.5 Attributives and predicatives

Adjectives, as we said earlier, may precede or follow their noun headwords, respectively, as attributives or predicatives.

4.5.1 Adjectives and their functional capacity

While most adjectives will conform to the formulae for attributive or predicative uses described in the previous sections, not every adjective in all its senses may be used attributively or predicatively. In other words, they vary in their functional capacity. Take the monosyllabic adjective 大 *dà* ‘big’, for example.

When 大 *dà* is used to indicate that something is physically ‘big’ or to mean ‘on a large scale’, it may be used either:

(a) attributively:

大象	dà xiàng	a big elephant
大蚂蚁	dà mǎyǐ	a big ant
大箱子	dà xiāngzi	a big box
大规模	dà guīmó	on a big scale
大问题	dà wèntí	a big problem
大错误	dà cuòwù	a big mistake

or

(b) predicatively:

那头象很大。	nèi tóu xiàng hěn dà That elephant is very large.
那只蚂蚁很大。	nèi zhī mǎyǐ hěn dà That ant is very big.
这个箱子很大。	zhèi ge xiāngzi hěn dà This box is very big.
规模很大	guīmó hěn dà It is on a big scale (lit. the scale is very big)
问题很大	wèntí hěn dà There is a big problem (lit. the problem is very big)
错误很大	cuòwù hěn dà It is a big mistake (lit. the mistake is very big)

However, when 大 **dà** is used to mean ‘big’ in a metaphorical sense, i.e. when it is removed from its primary sense of physical size, it has to be modified by 很 **hěn** ‘very’ not only when it is used predicatively but also as an attributive:

*大影响	dà yǐngxiǎng	
很大的影响	hěn dà de yǐngxiǎng	a big influence
影响很大	yǐngxiǎng hěn dà	The influence is considerable.
*大区别	dà qūbié	
很大的区别	hěn dà de qūbié	a big difference
区别很大	qūbié hěn dà	There is a major difference.
*大作用	dà zuòyòng	
很大的作用	hěn dà de zuòyòng	an important function
作用很大	zuòyòng hěn dà	The function is important.
*大权力	dà quánlì	
很大的权力	hěn dà de quánlì	enormous power
权力很大	quánlì hěn dà	The power is enormous.

There are other collocational restrictions. When 大 **dà** ‘big’ is used in the sense of ‘important’ with, say, 人物 **rénwù** ‘personage’, it can occur only attributively:

大人物	dà rénwù	a bigwig/an important personage
很大的人物	hěn dà de rénwù	a real bigwig

but not:

*这个人物很大 *zhèi ge rénwù hěn dà
*This personage is important.

Nor can 大 dà ‘big’ function predicatively in the sense of ‘serious’ in relation to 病 bìng ‘illness’:

大病 dà bìng a serious illness
很大的病 hěn dà de bìng an extremely serious illness

nor:

*他的病很大。 *tāde bìng hěn dà *His illness is serious.

On the other hand, when 大 dà ‘big’ means ‘fiery’ of 脾气 píqì ‘temper’, it is generally used predicatively:

她的脾气很大。 tāde píqì hěn dà She has (got) a fiery temper.

If it is to be used attributively, 很 hěn ‘very’ or some other modifier will have to be incorporated and the resultant phrase is restricted in meaning to somebody flying into a rage on a particular occasion:

发很大的脾气 fā hěn dà de píqì to fly into a temper
*大脾气 dà píqì *a bad temper

This goes to show that, while most adjectives can be used either attributively or predicatively, some are restricted to one function in particular collocations.

4.5.2 Attributive-only adjectives

These are generally non-gradable.¹⁴ They differentiate rather than describe, and most of them therefore have extremely restricted collocations. Monosyllabic adjectives in this category are relatively infrequent:

正数	zhèngshù	a positive number
负数	fùshù	a negative number
公鸡	gōngjī	rooster (lit. male fowl)
母牛	mǔniú	cow (lit. mother ox)

¹⁴ See §4.6.

Monosyllabic attributive-only adjectives include: 单 dān/复 fù ‘(of number) singular/plural’, 单 dān/双 shuāng ‘single/double’, 雌 cí/雄 xióng ‘(of animals) female/male’, 公 gōng/母 mǔ ‘(of animals) male/female’, 正 zhèng/副 fù ‘(of presidents, for example) the president/the vice president’, 正 zhèng/反 fǎn ‘one side/the reverse side’, 总 zǒng/分 fēn ‘headquarters/branches’, 横 héng/竖 shù ‘horizontal/vertical’.

Disyllabic attributive-only adjectives usually convey a formal tone, and they are more likely to have an internal lexical structure.¹⁵ The following attributive-only adjectives, for example, all have a modificational structure:

慢性病	mànxìng bìng a chronic disease (慢性 lit. slow nature)
头等舱	tóuděng cāng first-class cabin (头等 lit. first-grade)
现代音乐	xiàndài yīnyuè modern music (现代 lit. present generation)
大型水库	dàxíng shuǐkù a big reservoir (大型 lit. big type)

¹⁵ By internal lexical structure we mean the internal syntactic relationship between the two composing morphemes of a disyllabic adjective.

Attributive-only adjectives of a modificational structure include: 初步 **chūbù** ‘initial’, 短期 **duǎnqī** ‘short-term’, 长途 **chángtú** ‘long distance’, 人工 **réngōng** ‘artificial’, 不断 **bùduàn** ‘continuous’, 正式 **zhèngshì** ‘formal’, 良性 **liángxìng** ‘benign’, 妃色 **fēisè** ‘pink’, 高级 **gāojí** ‘high quality’, 中号 **zhōnghào** ‘medium-sized’, 野生 **yěshēng** ‘wild’, 万能 **wànnéng** ‘almighty’, 真正 **zhēnzhèng** ‘true’, 弱智 **ruòzhì** ‘mentally handicapped’.

Attributive-only adjectives may also have a governmental or predication structure:

忘我	wàngwǒ	selfless (lit. forgetting oneself)
无私	wúsī	unselfish (lit. not having selfishness)
有益	yǒuyì	beneficial (lit. having benefit)
人造	rénzào	artificial (lit. ‘man made’)
国营	guóyíng	state-owned (lit. ‘state-managed’)
自动	zìdòng	automatic (lit. ‘self-propelled’)

4.5.3 *Predicative-only adjectives*

These, on the other hand, are generally more colloquial in tone, and are mostly monosyllabic:

我很累。	wǒ hěn lèi I am very tired.
你的话很对。	nǐde huà hěn duì What you said is correct.
他写的字真棒。	tā xiě de zì zhēn bàng His handwriting is remarkably beautiful.
他的成绩很差。	tāde chéngjì hěn chà His examination results are poor.

The most commonly used predicative-only adjectives include: 背 *bèi* ‘hard of hearing’, 吵 *chǎo* ‘noisy’, 沉 *chén* ‘heavy’, 烦 *fán* ‘annoyed’, 够 *gòu* ‘enough’, 滑 *huá* ‘sly’, 活 *huó* ‘lively’, 困 *kùn* ‘sleepy’, 懒 *lǎn* ‘lazy’, 牢 *láo* ‘firm’, 紧 *jǐn* ‘tight’, 闷 *mēn* ‘stifling’, 闷 *mèn* ‘bored’, 腻 *nì* ‘greasy’, 松 *sōng* ‘loose’, 稳 *wěn* ‘stable’, 响 *xiǎng* ‘loud’, 香 *xiāng* ‘fragrant’, 行 *xíng* ‘feasible’, 痒 *yǎng* ‘itchy’, 匀 *yún* ‘even; well-mixed’, 准 *zhǔn* ‘accurate’.

However, there is no absolute divide between the two types of adjective that cannot be crossed. Though the result may sometimes sound a little forced, a predicative-only adjective can be made to function attributively by placing it in a ‘degree adverb + 的 *de*’ frame (e.g. 很差的学校 *hěn chà de xuéxiào* ‘a badly governed school’). Likewise, an attributive-only adjective can be made to function predicatively by setting it in a ‘是 *shì* + 的 *de*’ format (e.g. 这项工程是大型的。 *zhèi xiàng gōngchéng shì dàxíng de* ‘This is an enormous project’.).

4.6 Various inherent features of adjectives

The syntactic function of adjectives in Chinese varies with their inherent features. In the following sections, we will see these variances through a number of dichotomies.

4.6.1 Gradable vs non-gradable

Gradable adjectives form the greater part of the adjectival lexicon. They are of a descriptive nature and can be used freely both as attributives and as predicatives. Their most salient feature is that they can be modified by degree adverbs or complements:

高 <i>gāo</i>	tall	很高	<i>hěn gāo</i>	very tall
苦 <i>kǔ</i>	bitter	有点儿苦	<i>yǒu diǎnr kǔ</i>	somewhat bitter
穷 <i>qióng</i>	poor	穷得很	<i>qióng de hěn</i>	really poor
嫩 <i>nèn</i>	tender	嫩极了	<i>nèn jí le</i>	extremely tender

那儿起了一座很高的楼房。 *nàr qǐ le yī zuò hěn gāo de lóufáng*
A very tall building was erected there.

我不喜欢喝太浓的茶。 *wǒ bù xǐhuan hē tài nóng de chá*
I don’t like my tea too strong. (lit. I don’t like drinking very strong tea)

这个问题难极了。 *zhèi ge wèntí nán jí le*
This question is (simply) too difficult.

Non-gradable adjectives cannot be modified in this way:

男	nán male	*很男	* hěn nán *very male
单	dān single	*相当单	* xiāngdāng dān *quite single
现代	xiàndài modern	*现代得很	* xiàndài de hěn *modern to the extreme
合法	héfǎ legal	*合法极了	* héfǎ jí le *extremely legal

For non-gradable adjectives, the general predicative schema is 是 **shì** ... 的 **de** and not 很 **hěn** ... :

*这很非法。	* zhè hěn fēifǎ *This is illegal.
这是非法的。	zhè shì fēifǎ de This is illegal.
*那个人很女。	* nèi ge rén hěn nǚ *That person is very female.
那个人是女的。	nèi ge rén shì nǚ de That person is a woman/girl.

Further examples:

那张桌子是方的。	nèi zhāng zhuōzi shì fāng de That table is square
这个人是残废的。	zhèi ge rén shì cánfèi de This person is handicapped

Non-gradable adjectives include: 假 **jiǎ** 'false', 错 **cuò** 'wrong'.

There are, of course, a small number of adjectives that straddle the two categories:

他的话是对的。	tā de huà shì duì de His words are correct.
他的话很对。	tā de huà hěn duì His words are very correct.
那张桌子是圆的。	nèi zhāng zhuōzi shì yuán de That table is round.
那张桌子很圆。	nèi zhāng zhuōzi hěn yuán That table is truly round.

4.6.2 *Conditional vs unconditional*

Apart from the wide range of standard adjectives such as 大 *dà* ‘big’, 美丽 *měilì* ‘beautiful’, etc., which can be said to be used unconditionally as adjectives, there are adjectives that are derived from other word classes. These adjectives may be viewed as being conditional adjectives, which can be made to function as adjectives only in certain collocations and structures. They are therefore either collocation-specific or structure-specific. For example, the adjectival use of the noun 贼 *zéi* ‘thief’ to mean ‘sly’ is conditional on it occurring in a predicative position: 这个人真贼 *zhèi ge rén zhēn zéi* ‘This person is really cunning’. It can function attributively, but this is limited to only a few established idioms like 贼眉贼眼 *zéi méi zéi yǎn* ‘shifty’ (lit. thievish eyebrows and thievish eyes), 贼头贼脑 *zéi tóu zéi nǎo* ‘stealthy’ (lit. thievish head and thievish brain). The adjectival use of the verb 闹 *nào* ‘make a noise’ to mean ‘noisy’, too, is conditional on it being used in a predicative position: 这儿太闹了 *zhèr tài nào le* ‘It is too noisy here’. In fact, most of these conditional adjectives are predicative-only.

4.6.3 *Derivable vs non-derivable*

A large part of the Chinese adjectival lexicon consists of disyllabic adjectives that are formed on the basis of monosyllabic adjectives, which we may call stems. These disyllabic adjectives are therefore derivations or derivatives. For example, from 光 *guāng* ‘polished’ are derived such commonly used adjectives as 光滑 *guānghuá* ‘smooth’, 光亮 *guāngliàng* ‘luminous’, 光明 *guāngmíng* ‘bright’, 光洁 *guāngjié* ‘bright and clean’, 光溜 *guāngliū* ‘slippery’, 光润 *guāngrùn* ‘smooth (of skin)’, etc. From 冷 *lěng* ‘cold’ come 冷淡 *lěngdàn* ‘indifferent’, 冷寂 *lěngjì* ‘still’, 冷静 *lěngjìng* ‘sober, calm’, 冷酷 *lěngkù* ‘callous’, 冷落 *lěngluò* ‘desolate’, 冷漠 *lěngmò* ‘unconcerned’, 冷僻 *lěngpì* ‘deserted’, 冷涩 *lěngsè* ‘dull’ as well as 寒冷 *hánlěng* ‘frigid’, 冰冷 *bīnglěng* ‘ice-cold’.

There are, however, a small number of monosyllabic adjectives that do not normally act as stems for other adjectives, e.g. 嗲 *diǎ* ‘coquettish’, 帅 *shuài* ‘smart’, etc.

4.6.4 *Reduplicable vs non-reduplicable*

Monosyllabic adjectives indicating physical traits and appealing to the senses are usually reduplicable for descriptive purposes, often with an affectionate

tone, e.g. 白白的 **báibái de** ‘white as white can be’, 高高的 **gāogāo de** ‘towering’, 甜甜的 **tiántián de** ‘very sweet’, 香香的 **xiāngxiāng de** ‘sweet-smelling’, 软软的 **ruǎnruǎn de** ‘soft to the touch’, 静静的 **jìngjìng de** ‘very quiet’, etc. Once reduplicated, they describe rather than differentiate, as is the case normally with monosyllabic adjectives.

On the other hand, monosyllabic adjectives indicating absolute values, derogatory qualities or psychological traits cannot normally be reduplicated. For example:

*假假的	jiǎjiǎ de	*false
*丑丑的	chǒuchǒu de	*ugly
*恶恶的	è'è de	*fierce

They can nevertheless adopt the phonaesthetic type of extension, e.g. 恶狠狠 **èhěnhěh** ‘ferocious’, 懒洋洋 **lǎnyāngyāng** ‘languid’, 乐滋滋 **lèzīzī** ‘contented’, 傻乎乎 **shǎhūhū** ‘simple-minded’, 羞答答 **xiūdāda** ‘bashful’, 假惺惺 **jiǎxīngxīng** ‘hypocritical’, 臭烘烘 **chòuhōnghōng** ‘stinking’, etc. These phonaesthetic forms are more often used as adverbials than attributives.¹⁶

¹⁶ See Chapter 9 on adverbials.

A number of monosyllabic adjectives that indicate sensory responses may also incorporate phonaesthetic suffixes to enhance their descriptive effect, e.g. 白皑皑 **bái'ái'ái** ‘pure/snow white’, 甜丝丝 **tiánsīsī** ‘pleasantly sweet’, 香喷喷 **xiāngpēnpēn** ‘sweet-smelling’, 软绵绵 **ruǎnmiánmián** ‘extremely soft’, 矮墩墩 **ǎidūndūn** ‘pudgy’, 静悄悄 **jìngqiāoqiāo** ‘very quiet’, etc.

Disyllabic adjectives AB can be reduplicable but only in an AABB sequence and if they are originally descriptive adjectives regarding a person’s physical appearance, specific mannerisms, or inbuilt personality. For example,

白净 báijìng	白白净净 báibáijìngjìng	fair (of skin)
高大 gāodà	高高大大 gāogāodàdà	tall and big
匆忙 cōngmáng	匆匆忙忙 cōngcōngmángmáng	hastily
随便 suíbiàn	随随便便 suísuíbiànbàn	casually
散漫 sǎnmàn	散散漫漫 sǎnsǎnmànmàn	sloppily
仔细 zǐxì	仔仔细细 zǐzǐxìxì	meticulously

Reduplications like the above, as can be seen from the translations, are generally used as adverbials, apart from a few describing physical appearance.

4.6.5 Derogatory vs commendatory

Adjectives may be divided semantically for the most part into two major categories: derogatory and commendatory. Those that do not fall into either category may be said to be neutral. There are a number of collocational restrictions that apply to the two non-neutral categories.

Derogatory adjectives cannot be modified by the degree adverb 蛮 *mán* ‘fairly’ or complemented by the degree complement 得了不得 *de liǎobudé* ‘to an enormous extent’:

*蛮臭	mán chòu *fairly smelly
*悲观得了不得	bēiguān de liǎobudé *pessimistic to the extreme

Derogatory adjectives include: 坏 *huài* ‘bad’, 笨 *bèn* ‘stupid’, 丑 *chǒu* ‘ugly’, 懒 *lǎn* ‘lazy’, 粗心 *cūxīn* ‘careless’, 固执 *gùzhí* ‘stubborn’, 糊涂 *hútu* ‘muddle-headed’, 危险 *wēixiǎn* ‘dangerous’, 小气 *xiǎoqì* ‘stingy’, 自私 *zìsī* ‘selfish’.

Commendatory adjectives, on the other hand, cannot be modified by the degree adverb 有点儿 *yǒu diǎnr* ‘somewhat’ or complemented by a degree complement like 得要命 *de yàomìng* ‘to death’:

*有点儿香	yǒu diǎnr xiāng *somewhat sweet-smelling
*暖和得要命 ¹⁷	nuǎnhuo de yàomìng *warm in the extreme

¹⁷ Sometimes such degree complements are used with commendatory adjectives for rhetorical purposes, e.g. as hyperbole: 高兴得要死 *gāoxìng de yàosǐ* ‘happy in the extreme’, etc.

Commendatory adjectives include: 好 *hǎo* ‘good’, 乖 *guāi* ‘well-behaved’, 灵 *líng* ‘clever; effective’, 准 *zhǔn* ‘accurate’, 安全 *ānquán* ‘safe’, 聪明 *cōngmíng* ‘intelligent’, 方便 *fāngbiàn* ‘convenient’, 合适 *héshì* ‘suitable’, 漂亮 *piàoliang* ‘pretty’, 干净 *gānjìng* ‘clean’, 高兴 *gāoxìng* ‘high-spirited’, 健康 *jiànkāng* ‘healthy’, 容易 *róngyì* ‘easy’.

Neutral adjectives, however, have no such restrictions. For example:

蛮大	mán dà	fairly big
大得不得了	dà de bù de liǎo	extremely big
有点儿大	yǒu diǎnr dà	somewhat big
大得要命	dà de yàomìng	exceedingly big

Adjectives as
attributives
and
predicatives

4.7 Adjectives and valency

There are a number of adjectives in the language that, when used in a predicative position, will need to be associated with coverbal phrases or plural number subjects to convey their inherent dual- or multi-valency meanings. For example, one cannot very well say:

- *他很生疏。 **tā hěn shēngshū**
*He is unfamiliar with.
- *她很不和。 **tā hěn bùhé**
*She does not get along very well with.

Sentences along the following lines are, on the other hand, perfectly natural:

他对这儿的情况很生疏。
tā duì zhèr de qíngkuàng hěn shēngshū
He is not familiar with the situation here.

她们很不和。
tāmen hěn bùhé
They do not get along very well with each other.

or

她跟他很不和。
tā gēn tā hěn bùhé
She does not get along very well with him.

Dual- or multi-valency adjectives include: 熟悉 **shúxī** ‘familiar with’, 陌生 **mòshēng** ‘unfamiliar with’, 不满 **bùmǎn** ‘not happy with’, 要好 **yàohǎo** ‘on good terms with’, 一样 **yīyàng** ‘the same as’.

4.8 Adjectives and collocation

Adjectives also vary in their collocational capacity. Some like 大 **dà** ‘big’ and 新 **xīn** ‘new’, as we have seen, are of such a general nature that they can be used with many noun headwords without too many restrictions.

Most adjectives, however, are **collocationally specific**. In other words, particular adjectives tend to be linked with specific noun headwords. For example:

(a) attributively:

严格	yángé stringent
严格的规定	yángé de guīdìng stringent rules
严厉	yánlì severe
严厉的批评	yánlì de pīpíng severe criticism
严肃	yánsù solemn
严肃的气氛	yánsù de qìfēn a solemn atmosphere
严重	yánzhòng serious
严重的后果	yánzhòng de hòuguǒ serious consequences

(b) predicatively:

严格	yángé strict
要求很严格	yāoqiú hěn yángé the demands are strict
严厉	yánlì stern
声音很严厉	shēngyīn hěn yánlì the voice is stern
严肃	yánsù serious
态度很严肃	tàidù hěn yánsù the attitude is serious
严重	yánzhòng grave
事态很严重	shìtài hěn yánzhòng the situation is grave

There is some degree of flexibility in these collocational rules (e.g., 严厉 **yánlì** ‘stern’ and 严肃 **yánsù** ‘serious’ can both be used with 态度 **tàidù** ‘attitude’), but in practice, they are closely adhered to by native speakers.

4.9 Adjectives and comparison¹⁸

Adjectives as
attributives
and
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Comparison between two entities A and B is generally expressed in the formula: A + 比¹⁹ bǐ ‘compare with’ + B + adjective. For example,

你比我高。nǐ bǐ wǒ gāo

You are taller than me. (lit. you cv: compare with me tall)

我比你大。wǒ bǐ nǐ dà

I am older than you. (lit. I cv: compare with you big)

¹⁸ For comparisons with the verb 有 yǒu, see §16.5.

¹⁹ 比 bǐ is in fact a coverb. For a fuller discussion of coverbs, see Chapter 11.

In the formula, A can be a phrase or a clause, with B being often pruned to the minimum, keeping only the key point for comparison and dropping other repetitive elements. For example:

这件衬衫比那件[衬衫]贵。

zhèi jiàn chènshān bǐ nài jiàn [chènshān] guì

This shirt is more expensive than that one.

这个菜比那个[菜]好吃。

zhèi ge cài bǐ nài ge [cài] hǎochī

This dish is tastier than that one.

他跑得比我[跑得]快。

tā pǎo de bǐ wǒ [pǎo de] kuài

He runs faster than me. (lit. ... than I run)

我吃得比他[吃得]多。

wǒ chī de bǐ tā [chī de] duō

I eat more than him. (lit. ... than he eats)

It is possible to retain the repeated elements (given in the square brackets) but the sentence then sounds a little unnatural.

In fact, the last two examples can be reworded so that the two subjects/topics in the comparison share the same verb:

他比我跑得快。

tā bǐ wǒ pǎo de kuài

He runs faster than me.

我比他吃得多。

wǒ bǐ tā chī de duō

I eat more than him.

This indicates that the comparison is made not between the two actions, but between the two people concerned.

The adjective in the formula cannot be premodified,²⁰ but it may be complemented by a quantifier, indeterminate or precise:

*我比你很大。	wǒ bǐ nǐ hěn dà *I am much older than you.
我比你大(一)些。	wǒ bǐ nǐ dà (yī)xiē I am a little older than you.
我比你大两岁。	wǒ bǐ nǐ dà liǎng suì I am two years older than you
他比我高(一)点儿。	tā bǐ wǒ gāo (yī)diǎnr He is slightly taller than me.
他比我高一厘米。	tā bǐ wǒ gāo yī límǐ He is one centimetre taller than me.
我比他吃得多得多。	wǒ bǐ tā chī de duō de duō I eat much more than he does.
我比他吃得多一倍。	wǒ bǐ tā chī de duō yī bèi I eat twice as much as he does.
这个比那个贵一点。	zhèi ge bǐ nèi ge guì yīdiǎn This is a little dearer than that.
这个比那个贵三镑。	zhèi ge bǐ nèi ge guì sān bàng This is three pounds dearer than that.

²⁰ Premodification would take away the contrast necessary for the comparison. The only exception is the adverb 更 *gèng* 'even more' which is used as a premodifier, e.g. 我比你更大。 **wǒ bǐ nǐ gèng dà** 'I am even older than you'.

Chapter 5

Attributives other than adjectives

Attributives come in all forms and types and their function is to qualify or quantify nouns, to describe and delimit them. They may be (a) adjectives, (b) nouns, (c) verbs, (d) clauses, (e) prepositional or postpositional phrases, (f) numeral or demonstrative and measure word phrases, (g) pronouns, (h) idioms, etc.

For instance:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| (a) 黄狗 | brown dog |
| huánggǒu | adjective + noun |
| (b) 笔名 | pen name |
| bǐ míng | noun + noun |
| (c) 滚水 | boiling water |
| gǔnshuǐ | verb + noun |
| (d) 我买的東西 | the things I bought |
| wǒ mǎi de dōngxi | clause + noun |
| (e) 沿路的商店 | the shops along the road |
| yánlù de shāngdiàn | prepositional/coverbal phrase + noun |
| 家里的人 | the people at home |
| jiālǐ de rén | postpositional phrase + noun |
| (f) 两个女人 | two women |
| liǎng ge nǚrén | numeral + mw + noun |
| 那个男人 | that man |
| nèi ge nánrén | demonstrative + mw + noun |
| (g) 我的书 | my book(s) |
| wǒde shū | pronoun + noun |
| (h) 一望无际的草原 | boundless stretch of grassland |
| yī wàng wújì de cǎoyuán | idiom + noun |

From the above list, two features of the attributive in Chinese can be observed. First, it almost invariably precedes the noun it modifies;¹ and, second, the marker 的 *de* is regularly placed between the attributive and the noun. The presence of 的 *de* depends on the type of attributive being used, and details are given in the list of attributives below.

¹ Where attributives are very long, they can occur after the noun for stylistic reasons. See §5.3.2 below.

A further feature to be noted is that the presence of an attributive makes any item it qualifies or quantifies become automatically nominalised, whatever grammatical category it originally belonged to. Verbs and adjectives are often found to be nominalised in such a way. For example:

谢谢您无微不至的关怀。

xièxie nín wú wēi bù zhì de guānhuái

(lit. thank you (polite) meticulous *de* care)

Thank you for your meticulous care. (关怀 *guānhuái* v. to care for)

请宽恕我刚才的鲁莽。

qǐng kuānshù wǒ gāngcái de lǔmǎng

(lit. please forgive me just now *de* being rude)

Please excuse my rudeness just now. (鲁莽 *lǔmǎng* adj. rude)

我在此向您表示热烈的欢迎。

wǒ zài cǐ xiàng nín biǎoshì rèliè de huānyíng

(lit. I hereby cv: to you (polite) express warm *de* welcome)

I hereby express a warm welcome to you. (欢迎 *huānyíng* v. to welcome)

5.1 The different forms of attributive

Adjectives are attributives par excellence, and they have been fully discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, we shall concentrate on other forms of attributives, which are either of different word classes (e.g. nouns, verbs, etc.) or of different levels of structure (e.g. phrases, clauses, etc.).

5.1.1 Nouns

5.1.1.1 Nouns with zero marker

Nominal items as attributives have the tendency to form established words or expressions. They are usually placed directly in front of the headword they qualify:

冷水澡	lěngshuǐ zǎo	a cold bath (lit. cold water bath)
繁体字	fántǐ zì	unsimplified Chinese characters
双方意见	shuāngfāng yìjiàn	ideas put forward by both parties
世界记录	shìjiè jìlù	world record

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5.1.1.2 Nouns with an obligatory or optional 的 *de*

If a nominal item does not form an established quadrisyllabic expression, it will need 的 *de*:

现在的情况	xiànzài de qíngkuàng present situation
童年(的)生活	tóngnián (de) shēnghuó childhood days
个人(的)体会	gèrén (de) tǐhuì personal experience
色彩的浓淡	sècǎi de nóngdàn lighter or darker shades of colours

5.1.1.3 Nouns with phonaesthemes and 的 *de*

泪汪汪的眼睛	lèiwāngwāng de yǎnjīng tearful eyes
水淋淋的头发	shuǐlínlin de tóufa hair dripping with water

5.1.2 Verbs

5.1.2.1 Verbs with zero marker

If a verbal item with the noun constitutes an established expression, it does not take 的 *de*:

敲门声	qiāomén shēng the sound of knocking at the door
修订版	xiūdìng bǎn revised edition
印刷体	yìnshuā tǐ printed forms
退休生活	tuìxiū shēnghuó life of retirement

5.1.2.2 Verbs with 的 *de*

Otherwise in most cases, verbal attributives do require 的 *de*:

开会的日期	kāihuì de rìqī date for the meeting
要办的事情	yào bàn de shìqíng matters to attend to
渐渐远去的火车	jiànjiàn yuǎn qù de huǒchē a train disappearing into the distance
今天来参观的人	jīntiān lái cānguān de rén people who came to visit today

5.1.3 Clauses

Clausal attributives will always need 的 *de*:

他讲的话	tā jiǎng de huà what he said
你要的书	nǐ yào de shū the book you want
笔画多的字	bǐhuà duō de zì Chinese characters with many strokes
我们没有见过的东西	wǒmen méiyǒu jiànguò de dōngxi things we have not seen before

5.1.4 Prepositional or postpositional phrases with 的 *de*

5.1.4.1 Prepositional/coverbal phrases with 的 *de*

Prepositional or coverbal phrases as attributives are always followed by 的 *de*:

对北京的访问	duì běijīng de fǎngwèn visit to Beijing
在英国的日子	zài yīngguó de rìzi days in Britain
有关水利的著作	yǒuguān shuǐlì de zhùzuò writings on water conservation
沿路的商店	yánlù de shāngdiàn shops along the road

5.1.4.2 Postpositional phrases with 的 *de*

Postpositional phrases are essentially nominal in nature, and they will also generally need the presence of 的 *de* to function as attributives:

路上的行人	lùshàng de xíng rén	pedestrians on the road
壶里的水	húli de shuǐ	water in the pot
室内的空气	shì nèi de kōng qì	air inside the room
公路两旁的水渠	gōng lù liǎng páng de shuǐ qú	ditches on either side of the highway

5.1.5 Numerals or demonstratives and measure words

5.1.5.1 Numerals and measure words

Numeral and measure word expressions, strictly speaking, are not standard attributives, but are quantifiers that indicate number as well as indefinite reference.² They do not require 的 *de*:

一群青年	yī qún qīng nián	a group of young people
几个孩子	jǐ ge hái zǐ	several children
五天期限	wǔ tiān qī xiàn	five days' limit
两种说法	liǎng zhǒng shuō fǎ	two ways of putting it

² There are adjectives in the language other than numeral and measure word expressions that indicate indeterminate numbers, and they are likewise used without 的, e.g. 许多人 **xǔ duō rén** 'a lot of people', 不少钱 **bù shǎo qián** 'a large sum of money'.

5.1.5.2 Demonstratives and measure words

As with numerals and measure words, demonstrative and measure word expressions do not need 的 *de* when they are associated with noun headwords:

这些问题	zhè xiē wèn tí	these problems
那首诗	nèi shǒu shī	that poem
这场比赛	zhèi chǎng bǐ sài	this match
那件大衣	nèi yī jiàn dà yī	that overcoat

5.1.5.3 Demonstratives without measure words

On the other hand, in more formal writing, demonstratives may be used as attributives on their own without measure words, placed directly in front of noun headwords:

这人	zhèi rén	this person
这城市	zhèi chéngshì	this city
这孩子	zhèi háizi	this child
那时候	nèi shíhou	at that time

5.1.5.4 Reduplicated measure words with or without 的 *de*

Reduplicated measure word expressions indicating numerousness or exclusiveness may or may not be preceded by 一 *yī* 'one'. Where 一 *yī* is present, the marker 的 *de* is usually required; otherwise, 的 *de* is not generally used:

阵阵芳香	zhènzhen fāngxiāng	puffs of fragrance
条条大路	tiáotiáo dàlù	every road
一片片的白云	yī piànpiàn de báiyún	white clouds one after another
一封封的来信	yī fēngfēng de láixìn	every letter that arrived

5.1.6 Pronouns

5.1.6.1 Personal pronouns with or without 的 *de*

Personal pronouns used in their possessive forms may delimit their noun headwords with or without 的 *de*. The presence of 的 *de* usually depends on the intimacy of the association or on the rhythm of the utterance. If the association is close, 的 *de* is more likely to be omitted:

你妈妈	nǐ māma	your mother
他的脾气	tāde píqi	his temperament
她的名字	tāde míngzi	her name
我的请求	wǒde qǐngqiú	my request

5.1.6.2 Interrogative pronouns with or without measure words

Interrogative pronouns, if disyllabic or when incorporating a measure word, do not generally need 的 *de* to function as attributives. Monosyllabic interrogative pronouns on the other hand definitely do require 的 *de*:

多少钱?	duōshǎo qián	how much?
什么时候?	shénme shíhou	what time, when?
怎么回事?	zěnmē huí shì	what is the matter?
哪些问题?	něixiē wèntí	what problems?
谁的东西?	shuí/shéi de dōngxi	whose things?

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5.1.7 Idioms

5.1.7.1 Quadrisyllabic or trisyllabic idioms with 的 *de*

Quadrisyllabic or trisyllabic idioms must always be followed by 的 *de* to function as attributives:

一举两得的事	yījǔ liǎngdé de shì a stone that kills two birds
似是而非的论点	sì shì ér fēi de lùndiǎn a specious argument
久别重逢的亲人	jiǔbié chóngféng de qīnrén relatives reunited after a long parting
谦虚谨慎的作风	qiānxū jǐnshèn de zuòfēng a modest and prudent style
绕弯子的话	rào wānzi de huà beating about the bush (lit. words that go round bends)

5.1.7.2 Disyllabic expressions with 之 *zhī* qualifying a monosyllabic noun headword

One of the functions of 之 *zhī* in Classical Chinese was to be an attributive marker, and this function persists in the modern language in a number of set expressions. These expressions are always quadrisyllabic:

敬慕之心	jìngmù zhī xīn feelings of admiration and respect
无稽之谈	wújī zhī tán sheer nonsense (lit. a talk without evidence)
一孔之见	yī kǒng zhī jiàn a narrow view (lit. a view through one hole)
十天之内	shí tiān zhī nèi within ten days

5.1.7.3 Onomatopoeic terms with/without 的 *de* qualifying headword
一声 *yī shēng*

These expressions, like the previous ones, are formulaic and likewise must always be quadrisyllabic, including the headword 一声 *yī shēng* ‘the sound as indicated’. 的 *de* is used if the onomatopoeic term is monosyllabic; but not if it is disyllabic:

砰的一声	pēng de yī shēng	with a bang
匡啷一声	kuānglāng yī shēng	with a crushing sound

So we see that attributives in Chinese are generally placed before their headwords. They have the capacity to qualify or quantify. For some, 的 *de* must be present, for some it must not. In other cases 的 *de* is optional and its presence or absence is usually dictated by the needs of rhythm and balance.

5.2 The sequencing of attributives

When different types of attributives come together, they follow a definite pattern of sequencing. If we take the ‘numeral + measure word’ phrase as the dividing point, we see that some types of attributives generally go before the ‘num + mw’ phrase, while others usually follow it. Under certain conditions, post- ‘num + mw’ attributives may cross the boundary and become pre- ‘num + mw’ attributives. However, this is not usually the case the other way round.

Pre- ‘num + mw’ attributives tend to display the following semantic features:

(a) Possession

她的一个朋友
tāde yī ge péngyou
(lit. her one mw friend) A friend of hers.

我大儿子的那(一)辆汽车
wǒ dà érzi de nài (yī) liàng qìchē
(lit. my eldest son’s that (one) mw car) That car of my eldest son.

邻居的那(一)栋房子
línjū de nài (yī) dòng fángzi
(lit. neighbour’s that (one) mw house) That house of my neighbour.

(b) location

门上的那(一)层油漆

mén shàng de nài (yī) céng yóuqī

(lit. door-on **de** that (one) mw: layer paint)

The coat of paint on the door.

厨房里的两个柜子

chúfáng lǐ de liǎng ge guìzi

(lit. kitchen-inside **de** two mw cupboards)

The two cupboards in the kitchen.

花瓶里的那(一)些鲜花

huāpíng lǐ de nài (yī) xiē xiānhuā

(lit. flower vase-inside **de** those (one) mw: some fresh flowers)

Those fresh flowers in the vase.

(c) time

明天的三节课

míngtiān de sān jié kè

(lit. tomorrow **de** three mw classes)

The three lessons tomorrow.

两年来的一些积蓄

liǎng nián lái de yīxiē jīxù

(lit. last two years **de** one mw: some savings)

Some savings from the last two years.

上个月的一次聚会

shàng ge yuè de yī cì jùhuì

(lit. last month **de** one mw: time gathering)

One gathering last month.

(d) scope

这几种颜色

zhèi/zhè jǐ zhǒng yánsè

(lit. these a few mw: kinds colours)

These few colours.

别的一些事情

biéde yīxiē shìqíng

(lit. other one mw: some matters)

Some other matters.

Post- 'num + mw' attributives tend to be in the following semantic groups:

(e) state or activity

一些剩下的放时间

yīxiē shèngxià de shíjiān

(lit. one mw: some remaining **de** time)

Some remaining time.

一个到海滨去度假的计划

yī ge dào hǎibīn qù dùjià de jìhuà

(lit. one mw cv: to seaside go pass holiday **de** plan)

A plan to go for a seaside holiday.

那些她做的菜 **nèixiē tā zuò de cài**

(lit. those mw: some she make **de** food/dishes)

The food/dishes she made/cooked.

(f) characteristics

一个很直爽的人

yī ge hěn zhíshuǎng de rén

(lit. one mw very forthright **de** person)

A very forthright man/person.

一片朦胧的晨雾

yī piàn ménglóng de chénwù

(lit. one mw: stretch hazy **de** morning mist)

A stretch of hazy morning mist.

两只水汪汪的大眼睛

liǎng zhī shuǐwāngwāng de dà yǎnjīng

(lit. two mw limpid **de** big eyes)

Two big bright eyes.

(g) shape

一个圆圆的脑袋

yī ge yuányuán de nǎodài

(lit. one mw round **de** head)

A round head.

一顶伞形的帽子

yī dǐng sǎnxíng de màozi

(lit. one mw umbrella shape **de** hat)

An umbrella-shaped hat.

(h) colour

几朵白云 **jǐ duǒ bái yún**

(lit. a few mw white clouds) A few white clouds.

四个金字 **sì ge jīn zì**

(lit. four mw gold characters) Four golden characters.

一条天蓝色的裙子 **yī tiáo tiānlánsè de qúnzi**

(lit. one mw sky blue colour **de** skirt) A sky-blue skirt.

(i) material

一件棉布衬衫 **yī jiàn mián bù chèn shān**

(lit. one mw cotton cloth shirt) A cotton shirt.

一面铜镜 **yī miàn tóng jìng**

(lit. one mw bronze mirror) A bronze mirror.

三个搪瓷脸盆 **sān ge táng cí liǎn pén**

(lit. three mw enamel wash basin) Three enamel wash basins.

两三团毛线 **liǎng sān tuán máo xiàn**

(lit. two three mw: ball wool thread) Two or three balls of wool

(j) function

一个茶杯 **yī ge chá bēi**

(lit. one mw tea cup) A tea cup.

一双跑鞋 **yī shuāng pǎo xié**

(lit. one mw: pair run shoes) A pair of running shoes.

In theory, it is possible for all forms of attributive to come together to qualify and quantify the same headword. When this happens, the sequence of attributives will normally be:

- (a) possession (noun or pronoun)
- (b) location (postpositional or prepositional/coverbal phrase)
- (c) time (noun)
- (d) scope (demonstrative adjective, etc.)
numeral + measure word expression
- (e) state or activity (verbal phrase or clause)
- (f) characteristics (adjective)
- (g) shape (adjective)
- (h) colour (adjective)
- (i) material (noun)
- (j) function (noun or verb)

For example:

attributive

|| headword

她|鞋架上|去年|那|(一)双|穿了又穿(的)|破破烂烂的|尖头的|黑色|
棉布||拖鞋

tā xiéjià shàng qùnián nèi (yī) shuāng chuān le yòu chuān
(de) pòpòlànlan de jiāntóu de hēisè miánbù tuōxié

(lit. her | shoe-rack-top | last year | that | (one) mw: pair | wear **le**
again wear (**de**) | tattered **de** | pointed toe **de** | black colour |
cotton cloth || drag shoes (i.e. slippers))

That pair of tattered, black cotton slippers on the shoe rack with pointed toes that she wore over and over again last year.

If we arrange the sentence vertically, we shall see the order of the attributives more clearly:

她	tā	possession
	her	
鞋架上	xiéjià shàng	location
	shoe rack top	
去年	qùnián	time
	last year	
那	nèi	scope
	that	
(一)双	(yī) shuāng	numeral + measure word
	(one) pair	
穿了又穿(的)	chuānle yòu chuān de	activity
	wore and <u>wore again</u>	
破破烂烂的	pòpòlànlan de	characteristics
	tattered	
尖头的	jiāntóu de	shape
	pointed	
黑色	hēisè	colour
	black	
棉布	miánbù	material
	cotton	
拖	tuō	function
	drag	
鞋	xié	headword
	shoes (i.e. slippers)	

For the sake of rhythm or clarity of message, the ‘state and activity’ attributive can often be placed in a position immediately before the ‘scope’ attributive, if there is one, and the ‘numeral + measure word’. The middle section of the sentence above would therefore become:

...穿了又穿的那一双 ...**chuān le yòu chuān de nài yī shuāng**
instead of

...那一双穿了又穿的 ...**nài yī shuāng chuān le yòu chuān de**

5.3 Combination, embedding and delaying

5.3.1 Commas or conjunctions

When attributives of the same type occur with a headword, they are joined by commas³ or conjunctions:

远远地驶来了一艘轻捷、美观、整洁的游艇。

yuǎnyuǎn de shǐlái le yī sōu qīngjié | měiguān | zhěngjié de yóutǐng

(lit. distant **de** sail-come **le** one mw light-quick, attractive, neat yacht)

In the distance an attractive, neat, light yacht approached.

他是一个思想活跃而又谦虚谨慎的人。

tā shì yī ge sīxiǎng huóyuè ér yòu qiānxū jǐnshèn de rén

(lit. he is one mw thinking lively but also modest prudent **de** person)

He is someone who has a lively mind, but is also modest and cautious.

缺页或装订上有误差的书，都可以退换。

quē yè huò zhuāngdīng shàng yǒu wùchā de shū | dōu kěyǐ tuìhuàn

(lit. lack pages or binding-on have faults **de** books, all may return exchange)

Any book with missing pages or faulty binding can be exchanged.

整个城市沉浸在热烈和欢快的气氛中。

zhěng ge chéngshì chénjìn zài rèliè hé huānkuaì de qìfēn zhōng

(lit. whole mw city immersed cv: in enthusiastic and happy **de** atmosphere-in)

The whole city was immersed in an enthusiastic and happy atmosphere.

³ Note that, when listing items, the Chinese convention is to use a reversed (*dun*) comma, /、/.

谁都喜欢这个真诚而热情的姑娘。

shuí dōu xǐhuan zhèi ge zhēnchéng ér rèqíng de gūniang

(lit. everyone all like this mw sincere but warm girl)

Everyone likes this sincere and enthusiastic young woman.

5.3.2 Longer attributives

Longer attributives may sometimes have other ‘attributive + headword’ constructions embedded in them. For example:

草地上出现了一条来来往往的行人踏出来的小道。

**cǎodì shàng chūxiànle yī tiáo [(láiláiwǎngwǎng de xíng rén)
tā chūlai de] xiǎodào**

(lit. grassland-on appear **le** one mw [coming going **de** pedestrians]
tread out come **de** small path)

On the grass, appeared a small path made by the steps of constant passers-by.

她买了一套跟浅绿色的地毯配起来特别和谐、悦目的家具。

**tā mǎile yī tào [gēn (qiǎn lǜ sè de dìtǎn) pèi qīlai tèbié héxié
yuèmù de] jiājù**

(lit. she buy **le** one mw: suite [cv: with (light green colour **de** carpet)
match especially harmonious, attractive **de**] furniture)

She bought a suite of furniture that matched particularly harmoniously and attractively with the light-green carpet.

However, Chinese is not a language that is comfortable with long attributives, and the examples above would quite likely be divided into two sections:

草地上出现了一条小道, 是来来往往的行人踏出来的。

**cǎodì shàng chūxiànle yī tiáo xiǎodào | shì láiláiwǎngwǎng
de xíng rén tā chūlai de**

(lit. grassland-on appear **le** one mw small path, is coming going **de**
pedestrian tread out come **de**)

On the grass, appeared a small path made by the steps of constant passers-by.

她买了一套家具, 跟浅绿色的地毯配起来, 特别和谐、悦目。

**tā mǎile yī tào jiājù | gēn qiǎn lǜ sè de dìtǎn pèi qīlai | tèbié
héxié yuèmù**

(lit. she buy **le** one mw:suite furniture, cv: with light green colour **de**
carpet match, especially harmonious, attractive)

She bought a suite of furniture matching particularly harmoniously and attractively with the light-green carpet.

This unease with long attributives leads to a stylistic preference to have two or more short attributives placed in sequence after a noun headword and separated from each other by commas. For example:

草地上出现了一条小道，<是来来往往的行人踏出来的，<弯弯曲曲，<一直伸向山颠，<远远看去，忽隐忽现，<好象一条条巨大的蚯蚓，<<一伸一缩，<<奋力向上游着。

cǎodì shàng chūxiànle yī tiáo xiǎodào |<shì láiláiwǎngwǎng de xíng rén tà chūlai de |<wānwānqūqū |<yīzhí shēn xiàng shāndiān |<yuǎnyuǎn kàn qù | hū yǐn hū xiàn |<hǎoxiàng yī tiáotiáo jùdà de qiūyǐn |<<yī shēn yī suō |<<fènlì xiàngshàng yóuzhe

(lit. grassland on appear **le** one mw small path, <is coming going **de** pedestrians tread out come **de**, <winding, <straight stretch cv: towards mountain peak, <distantly look, suddenly disappear suddenly appear, <resemble one mw mw huge **de** earthworm <<one stretch one contract, <<strive cv: towards travel **zhe**)

On the grass appeared a small path, made by the steps of constant passers-by, which wound right up to the mountain peak appearing and disappearing in the distance like a series of giant earthworms that, stretching and recoiling, were striving to move upwards.

All the sections marked with < are clearly attributable to their fronted headword 小道 **xiǎodào** ‘small path’, but when we come to the nominal 蚯蚓 **qiūyǐn** ‘earthworm’, it then becomes a second headword and the two sections marked << are attributable to it. Theoretically, an articulated attributive chain like this could stretch even further, but it would naturally be curtailed by stylistic and other constraints.

Chapter 6

Action verbs

Action verb is a portmanteau term used here to cover all the verbs in the language apart from non-action verbs such as 是 *shì* ‘to be’ and 有 *yǒu* ‘to have’ and verbs of emotion or cognition. Their major distinctive feature is that they generally indicate transient performance. Therefore, they are more narrative or descriptive, recounting past events or depicting ongoing actions, whereas non-action verbs tend to register more or less permanent states or characteristics and are therefore more expository. In other words, action verbs play a more prominent role in narration or description, while non-action verbs focus more on explanation. This, of course, does not imply that action verbs cannot be used for purposes other than narration or description, but there is a clear distinction between the subject of an action verb predicate and the topic of a comment expressed by 是 *shì* ‘to be’, 有 *yǒu* ‘to have’ or an emotional or cognitive verb. In the former case, the subject either initiates or tolerates the action encoded in the predicate, while in the latter, the topic is linked to further explanations expressed in the comment. Compare the following.

subject–predicate structures:

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 我吃了一碗面。 wǒ chī le yī wǎn miàn | (narrative) |
| I ate a bowl of noodles. | |
| 他收到了两封信。 tā shōudào le liǎng fēng xìn | (narrative) |
| He received two letters. | |
| 妹妹在弹钢琴。 mèimei zài tán gāngqín | (descriptive) |
| My younger sister is playing the piano. | |

topic–comment structures:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| 我是大学教师。 wǒ shì dàxué jiàoshī | (expository) |
| I am a university teacher. | |

他有两个弟弟。 tā yǒu liǎng ge dìdì	(expository)
He has two younger brothers.	
哥哥喜欢喝啤酒。 gēge xǐhuan hē píjiǔ	(expository)
My elder brother likes drinking beer.	

We will pick up these differences again in later chapters, and, in particular, in [Chapter 20](#), but here, we will focus on the intrinsic features of action verbs: their diverse structural categories and their formal and semantic relations with the subject and the object. In the next two chapters, we will discuss the relationship of action verbs with time and location expressions.

6.1 Transitive and intransitive

Action verbs can be transitive or intransitive. The difference is that the former takes an object, while the latter does not. For example:

(a) transitive verbs:

他在学中文。 tā zài xué zhōngwén	He is studying Chinese.
她去了伦敦。 tā qù le lúndūn	She went to London.

(b) intransitive verbs:

春天到了。 ¹ chūntiān dào le	Spring has come.
太阳出来了。 tàiyáng chū lái le	The sun has come out.

¹ The inclusion of end-of-sentence particle 了 *le* actually turns an action verb predicate into an explanation, thus making the whole sentence expository. This will be fully discussed in [Chapter 20](#).

Quite often, a verb can be used both transitively and intransitively:

(a) 请原谅。	qǐng yuánliàng	Please excuse me. ²
我原谅了他。	wǒ yuánliàng le tā	I forgave him.
(b) 她笑了。	tā xiào le	She laughed/smiled.
别笑我。	bié xiào wǒ	Don't laugh at me.
(c) 菜来了。	cài lái le	The food has arrived.
请来两个菜。	qǐng lái liǎng ge cài	Please bring two dishes.
(d) 他已经离开了。	tā yǐjīng líkāi le	He has already left.
他已经离开这儿了。	tā yǐjīng líkāi zhèr le	He has already left here.

² The English translation requires a transitive verb and object.

The term 'object' broadly refers to any nominal or pronominal item (or nominalised verbal or clausal expression) coming immediately after the verb,

whether it indicates animate beings or inanimate objects, time, location, result, instrument or activity. The possible semantic diversity of objects bespeaks the general flexibility of syntactic rules in languages. Very often a transitive verb may take objects of different semantic orientations. For example:

母鸡在孵小鸡。	mǔjī zài fū xiǎojī The hen is hatching (its) chicks.
母鸡在孵蛋。	mǔjī zài fū dàn The hen is hatching eggs.
母亲在喂小孩。	mǔqīn zài wèi xiǎohái The mother is feeding her child.
母亲在喂奶。	mǔqīn zài wèi nǎi (lit. the mother is feeding milk [to her baby]) The mother is breast-feeding.

There are far more transitive than intransitive verbs in Chinese. Apart from those indicating posture (e.g. 站 **zhàn** 'to stand', 坐 **zuò** 'to sit'), body movement (e.g. 跳 **tiào** 'to jump', 爬 **pá** 'climb; crawl'), emotion (e.g. 笑 **xiào** 'to smile; laugh', 哭 **kū** 'to cry; weep') and physical or chemical changes (e.g. 变 **biàn** 'to change', 溶化 **rónghuà** 'to dissolve'), which are essentially intransitive, the great majority of action verbs are transitive in nature. Many intransitive verbs or intransitive uses of transitive verbs in English, for example, will find their Chinese counterparts encoded in a disyllabic 'verb + object' structure. For example:

sing	唱歌	chànggē	(lit. sing songs)
dance	跳舞	tiàowǔ	(lit. leap dances)
swim	游泳	yóuyóǒng	(lit. swim swims)
read	看书	kànshū	(lit. see books)
talk	谈话	tànhuà	(lit. talk words)
walk	走路	zǒulù	(lit. walk paths)
run	跑步	pǎobù	(lit. run steps)
sleep	睡觉	shuìjiào	(lit. sleep a sleep)
drive	开车	kāichē	(lit. drive a car)
cook	煮饭	zhǔfàn	(lit. boil rice)
rain	下雨	xiàyǔ	(lit. pour down rain)

These apparently intransitive verbs nonetheless remain strictly 'verb + object' constructions and as such they cannot be followed by additional grammatical items in a sentence. For example, 'to walk for ten miles' or 'to sleep for three hours' is expressed by interposing a time modification before the object:

走路	zǒulù to walk
走了十英里(的)路	zǒu le shí yīnglǐ (de) lù (he) walked for ten miles
*走路了十英里	* zǒulù le shí yīnglǐ
睡觉	shuìjiào to sleep
睡了三个钟头(的)觉	shuì le sān ge zhōngtóu (de) jiào (he) slept for three hours
*睡觉了三个钟头	* shuìjiào le sān ge zhōngtóu
下雨	xiàyǔ to rain
下了两天雨	xià le liǎng tiān yǔ (it) rained for two days
*下雨了两天	* xiàyǔ le liǎng tiān

In other cases, a coverb³ will be introduced:

见面	jiànmiàn	to meet (lit. to see face)
他跟她见了面。	tā gēn tā jiàn le miàn	He met her.
*他见面了她。	* tā jiànmiàn le tā	
接吻	jiēwěn	to kiss (lit. to link lips)
他在跟她接吻。	tā zài gēn tā jiēwěn	He is kissing her.
*他在接吻她。	* tā zài jiēwěn tā	

³ See [Chapter 11](#) on coverbs.

6.2 Dynamic and static differences

A noticeable semantic dimension that affects the use of action verbs in Chinese is the difference between dynamic and static verbs. A dynamic action verb implies that the action travels across a certain space, whereas a static action verb does not. This can be clearly illustrated by the difference between ‘walk’ and ‘stand’: when one walks, one moves from one location to another, whereas when one stands, one either stays in one place or changes from a sitting position to a standing position and no change of location is involved.

The dynamic or static nature of an action verb will decide whether a location phrase associated with it precedes or follows it. A dynamic action verb

will have location phrases preceding it, whereas a static action verb may have a location phrase either preceding it or following it. For example:

他在公园里散步。	tā zài gōngyuán lì sànbù He is having a walk in the park.
*他散步在公园里。	* tā sànbù zài gōngyuán lì He is having a walk in the park.
他在草地上坐着。 ⁴	tā zài cǎodì shàng zuò zhe He is sitting on the grass.
他坐在草地上。	tā zuò zài cǎodì shàng He is sitting on the grass.

⁴ The addition of the particle 着 *zhe* to the verb changes it from narrative mode to descriptive mode. This will be discussed in [Chapter 20](#).

6.3 Dative verbs

With some transitive verbs (dative verbs), two objects rather than one are present, in the sequence of an indirect object followed by a direct object. In other words, while the valency of ordinary transitive verbs is two (i.e. subject and object) that of dative verbs is three (subject, indirect object and direct object). For example:

姐姐给了我一个苹果。 **jiějie gěi le wǒ yī ge píngguǒ**
(My) elder sister gave me an apple.

爸爸送了我一个很漂亮的生日礼物。
bàba sòng le wǒ yī ge hěn piàoliang de shēngrì lǐwù
Father gave me a very beautiful birthday present.

王老师在教我们英文。⁵ **wáng lǎoshī zài jiāo wǒmen yīngwén**
Teacher Wang is teaching us English.

我还了他两镑钱。 **wǒ huán le tā liǎng bàng qián**
I gave him back two pounds.

我收了他两镑钱。 **wǒ shōu le tā liǎng bàng qián**
I received two pounds from him.

他们赔了我十块钱。 **tāmen péi le wǒ shí kuài qián**
They paid me ten yuan/dollars compensation.

⁵ Teacher (老师 *lǎoshī*) is a commonly used title in Chinese.

Dative verbs, as we can see, are primarily verbs that indicate giving, receiving, paying, returning, and so on, where two parties (usually the subject

and the indirect object) are transmitting something (usually the direct object) between them.

Other similar verbs are:

退 **tuì** 'to return (unwanted goods)', 找 **zhǎo** 'to give change', 付 **fù** 'to pay', 奖 **jiǎng** 'to award', 赏 **shǎng** 'to reward', 赠 **zèng** 'to present with', 分 **fēn** 'to apportion'.

给 **gěi** 'to give' is used not only as a dative verb on its own but also in tandem with other verbs to form disyllabic dative verbs. The subject of these verbs must be the giver and the indirect object the beneficiary:

我还给他两镑钱。 **wǒ huán gěi tā liǎng bàng qián**

I returned/gave back two pounds to him.

我交给他一封信。 **wǒ jiāo gěi tā yī fēng xìn**

I handed over a letter to him.

她递给我一杯啤酒。 **tā dì gěi wǒ yī bēi píjiǔ**

She handed me a glass of beer.

师傅传给我不少技艺。 **shīfu chuán gěi wǒ bùshǎo jìyì**

The master (worker) passed on to me many skills.

The following verbs often incorporate 给 **gěi** 'to give' as the second syllable:

捐 **juān** 'to donate', 卖 **mài** 'to sell', 输 **shū** 'to lose (in a game)',
补 **bǔ** 'to supplement', 扔 **rēng** 'to throw to', 发 **fā** 'to distribute',
寄 **jì** 'to send by post', 派 **pài** 'to despatch (people) to', 介绍
jièshào 'to introduce', 推荐 **tuījiàn** 'to recommend', 分配 **fēnpèi**
'to assign or allocate to', 贡献 **gòngxiàn** 'to contribute'.

In the case of 借 **jiè**, which means both 'to borrow' and 'to lend', and 租 **zū**, which means both 'to hire' and 'to rent', 给 **gěi** 'to give' must be incorporated to express the difference between the two meanings:

他借了我两镑钱。 **tā jiè le wǒ liǎng bàng qián**

He borrowed two pounds from me.

他借给我两镑钱。 **tā jiè gěi wǒ liǎng bàng qián**

He lent me two pounds.

我租了他们一间屋子。 **wǒ zū le tāmen yī jiān wūzi**

I rented a room from them.

我租给他们一间屋子。 **wǒ zū gěi tāmen yī jiān wūzi**

I rented a room to them.

As well as being incorporated into disyllabic verbs, 给 *gěi* ‘to give’ may also be placed before the verb or towards the end of the sentence to create a coverbal construction. Used in this way, it can occur with a wider range of verbs:

她给我倒了杯茶。 *tā gěi wǒ dào le bēi chá*

她倒了杯茶给我。 *tā dào le bēi chá gěi wǒ*

She poured me a cup of tea.

他给我做了碗面。 *tā gěi wǒ zuò le wǎn miàn*

他做了碗面给我。 *tā zuò le wǎn miàn gěi wǒ*

He made me a bowl of noodles.

我给他打了个电话。 *wǒ gěi tā dǎ le ge diànhuà*

我打了个电话给他。 *wǒ dǎ le ge diànhuà gěi tā*

I telephoned him.

给 *gěi* ‘to give’ may incorporate 予 *yǔ* or 与 *yǔ* ‘to give’ to form the disyllabic 给予 *jǐyǔ*⁶ ‘to give’, particularly when its direct object is abstract rather than concrete, and is generally modified by an [degree] adjective.

他们给予我极大的支持⁷。 *tāmen jǐyǔ wǒ jídà de zhīchí*

They gave me very great support.

这番话给予他们极大的鼓舞。 *zhè fān huà jǐyǔ tāmen jídà de gǔwǔ*

These words gave them great encouragement.

⁶ Note a change of pronunciation here from *gěiyǔ* to *jǐyǔ*, though *gěiyǔ* is also sometimes heard.

⁷ Some speakers are uneasy about 给予/给与 *jǐyǔ* taking an indirect object, and they reword the sentence with a coverbal phrase, e.g. 他们对我给予极大的支持。 *tāmen duì wǒ jǐyǔ jídà de zhīchí*

给 *gěi* ‘to give’ may also be used in this capacity on its own with no change in pronunciation and its abstract direct object may be preceded by an optional 以 *yǐ*:

他们的反对给了他沉重的打击。

tāmen de fǎnduì gěi le tā chénzhòng de dǎjī

or

他们的反对给他以沉重的打击。

tāmen de fǎnduì gěi tā yǐ chénzhòng de dǎjī

Their opposition gave him a heavy blow.

The second version with the optional 以 *yǐ*, however, changes a narrative (with an aspect marker 了 *le*) into an expository sentence.

Other abstract nouns commonly used with 给予 *jǐyǔ* 'to give' include:

影响 *yǐngxiǎng* 'influence', 印象 *yìnxiàng* 'impression', 力量 *lìliàng* 'strength', 帮助 *bāngzhù* 'help', 支持 *zhīchí* 'support', 安慰 *ānwèi* 'consolation', 勇气 *yǒngqì* 'courage', 教育 *jiàoyù* 'education', 鼓励 *gǔlì* 'encouragement'.

With certain dative verbs, the subject is the beneficiary or recipient:

我拿了 you 一瓶酱油。 *wǒ ná le nǐ yī píng jiàngyóu*
I took a bottle of soy sauce from you.

他们罚了你多少钱? *tāmen fá le nǐ duōshao qián*
How much did they fine you?

Other similar verbs include:

欠 *qiàn* 'owe', 赢 *yíng* 'to win (in a game)', 扣 *kòu* 'to deduct',
偷 *tōu* 'to steal', 抢 *qiǎng* 'to rob', 骗 *piàn* 'to cheat out of',
赚 *zhuàn* 'to earn'.

If what is given is information of one form or another, verbs like the following are used:

大家都叫我小李⁸。 *dàjiā dōu jiào wǒ xiǎolǐ*
Everyone calls me Xiao (Little) Li.

我托你一件事。 *wǒ tuō nǐ yī jiàn shì*
(lit. I entrust a matter to you) Can you do me a favour?

他瞒了我一件事儿。 *tā mán le wǒ yī jiàn shìr*
He hid a matter from me./He did not tell me about something.

他们限我两天。 *tāmen xiàn wǒ liàng tiān*
They limited me to two days.

他告诉我明天开会。 *tā gàosu wǒ míngtiān kāihuì*
He told me the meeting was/is tomorrow.

人人都说他糊涂。 *rénrén dōu shuō tā hútu*
Everyone says he is stupid.

她看中他聪明。 *tā kànzòng tā cōngmíng*
She was attracted by his intelligence.

他责备我没把这件事儿办好。
tā zébei wǒ méi bǎ zhèi jiàn shìr bàn hǎo
He blamed me for not doing this well/getting this done.

⁸ A colloquial alternative to this is: 大家都管我叫小李。 *dàjiā dōu guǎn wǒ jiào xiǎo lǐ*.

As we can see from the last few examples, the direct object is a verbal message, and, as such, it can be an adjectival or verbal expression, or even a clause.

Other such verbs include:

劝 **quàn** 'to persuade', 求 **qiú** 'to plead with', 称呼 **chēnghū** 'to call (by a certain name)', 骂 **mà** 'to criticise', 问 **wèn** 'to ask', 请教 **qǐngjiào** 'to consult', 通知 **tōngzhī** 'to inform', 嘱咐 **zhǔfù** 'to warn or advise', 答应 **dāying** 'to promise', 回答 **huídá** 'to reply to', 抱怨 **bàoyuàn** 'to complain', 表扬 **biǎoyáng** 'to praise'.

Finally, some dative verbs express physical or psychological infliction:

他打了我一拳。 **tā dǎ le wǒ yī quán**
(lit. He hit **le** me one fist) He gave me a punch.

她看了我一眼。 **tā kàn le wǒ yī yǎn**
(lit. She look **le** me one eye) She gave me a look.

我踢了他一脚。 **wǒ tī le tā yī jiǎo**
(lit. I kick **le** him one foot) I gave him a kick.

这件事儿吓了我一身汗。 **zhè jiàn shìr xià le wǒ yī shēn hàn**
(lit. This mw business startle **le** me one body of sweat)
This business brought me out in a sweat.

In these cases, the indirect object is always a noun preceded by the numeral 一 **yī** 'one' with a measure.

Other such verbs include:

吐 **tǔ** 'to spit', 溅 **jiàn** 'to splash', 累 **lèi** 'to tire', 急 **jí** 'to worry',
告 **gào** ... 状 **zhuàng** 'to accuse ... of', 出 **chū** ... 丑 **chǒu**
'to put ... to shame'.

6.4 Causative verbs

Some transitive action verbs, on the other hand, not only transmit an action on to an object but also cause the object to produce a further action or actions itself. They therefore produce a knock-on effect, with one action leading to another. Theoretically, this knock-on effect can continue to repeat itself as long as the meaning remains clear.

妈妈叫我哥哥教妹妹写字。

māma jiào wǒ jiào gēge jiāo mèimei xiězì

Mother told me to tell [my] elder brother to teach [my] younger sister to write.

他求我帮他做一件事。 **tā qiú wǒ bāng tā zuò yī jiàn shì**
He asked me to help him do something.

Generally, however, one follow-up action is more common:

我朋友请我吃饭。 **wǒ péngyou qǐng wǒ chīfàn**
My friend invited me to eat/for a meal.

什么使东西落到地上? **shénme shǐ dōngxi luò dào dì shàng**
What causes things to fall to the ground?

医生让她好好休息。 **yīshēng ràng tā hǎohǎo xiūxi**
The doctor told her to have a good rest.

我劝他戒烟, 他劝我戒酒。 **wǒ quàn tā jièyān | tā quàn wǒ jièjiǔ**
I urged him to give up smoking, and he urged me to give up drinking.

奶奶要我替她写信。 **nǎinai yào wǒ tì tā xiěxìn**
Grandma wanted me to write a letter for her.

It is worth noting that despite the fact that causative verbs help to narrate events, they do not usually incorporate the particle 了 *le*. The second verb in the chain may, of course, take 了 *le* to emphasise that the desired action has already been carried out.

我朋友请我吃了一顿饭。 **wǒ péngyou qǐng wǒ chī le yī dùn fàn**
My friend invited me to a meal.

医生让她好好地休息了几天。
yīshēng ràng tā hǎohǎo de xiūxi le jǐ tiān
The doctor told her to make sure she rested for a few days.

奶奶要我替她写了一封信。 **nǎinai yào wǒ tì tā xiě le yī fēng xìn**
Grandma had me write a letter for her.

Causative verbs with the underlying notion of making somebody do something range from request to requirement and from order to coercion:

我挽留他多坐一会儿。 **wǒ wǎnliú tā duō zuò yīhuìr**
I pressed him to stay a bit longer.

妈妈催弟弟快睡。 **māma cuī dìdì kuài shuì**
Mother urged younger brother to hurry up and go to bed.

别惹你爸爸生气。 **bié rě nǐ bàba shēngqì**
Don't make your father angry.

这个孩子真逗人喜欢。 **zhèi ge hái zi zhēn dòu rén xǐhuan**
This child really makes people like him.

大家选我当经理。 **dàjiā xuǎn wǒ dāng jīnglǐ**
Everyone elected/chose me to be the manager.

法官传证人出庭作证。

fǎguān chuán zhèngren chūtíng zuòzhèng

The judge summoned the witness to appear in the court and
give evidence.

Other such verbs include:

烦 **fán** 'to bother', 烦劳 **fánláo** 'to trouble', 指望 **zhǐwàng**
'to expect', 托 **tuō** 'to entrust', 要求 **yāoqiú** 'to require',
嘱咐 **zhǔfù** 'to enjoin', 安排 **ānpái** 'to arrange', 组织 **zǔzhī**
'to organise', 命令 **mìnglìng** 'to order', 指定 **zhǐdìng** 'to designate',
指示 **zhǐshì** 'to instruct', 打发 **dǎfā** 'to send sb away', 派 **pài**
'to despatch sb', 召集 **zhàojí** 'to muster', 逼 **bī** 'to force',
强迫 **qiángpò** 'to coerce'.

Sometimes the subject of the sentence does not make somebody do some-
thing but rather allows, encourages, or prevents an action:

他支持我提出抗议。 **tā zhīchí wǒ tíchū kàngyì**
He supported me in my protest.

她怂恿弟弟去干坏事。 **tā sǒngyǒng dìdì qù gàn huàishì**
She incited [her] younger brother to do something wrong.

管理员禁止游客乱扔果皮纸屑。

guǎnlǐyuán jìnzhǐ yóukè luàn rēng guǒpí zhǐxiè
The person on duty told the tourists not to drop litter.

爸爸不准我去打猎。 **bàba bù zhǔn wǒ qù dǎ liè**
Father won't let me go hunting.

Other such verbs include:

允许 **yǔnxǔ** 'to allow', 鼓励 **gǔlì** 'to encourage', 勉励 **miǎnlì**
'to spur on', 影响 **yǐngxiǎng** 'to affect', 制止 **zhìzhǐ** 'to prevent',
劝阻 **quànǔ** 'to dissuade'.

The subject may be involved or become involved in the subsequent action:

我约他到城里去逛逛。 **wǒ yuē tā dào chéng lǐ qù guàngguang**
I arranged with/made an appointment with him to go for a stroll in town.

我来帮你收拾行李吧。 **wǒ lái bāng nǐ shōushì xíngli ba**
I'll/Why don't I come and help you pack your luggage.

我陪客人吃了一顿饭。 **wǒ péi kèrén chī le yī dùn fàn**
I accompanied the guests for a meal.

老师带领学生参观展览会。
lǎoshī dàilǐng xuésheng cānguān zhǎnlǎnhuì
The teacher took the students to visit the exhibition.

他扶我上楼。 **tā fú wǒ shàng lóu**
He helped me upstairs.

我送他到火车站。 **wǒ sòng tā dào huǒchēzhàn**
I saw him off to the station.

If the subject is inanimate, 使 **shǐ** and its more colloquial or formal counterparts are generally used:

这件事使我十分失望。 **zhèi jiàn shì shǐ wǒ shífēn shīwàng**
This business makes me extremely disappointed.

这种精神使人十分钦佩。 **zhèi zhǒng jīngshen shǐ rén shífēn qīnpèi**
This kind of vitality/spirit fills people with admiration.

那样的话教人作呕。 **nàyàng de huà jiāo rén zuò'ǒu**
Talk like that makes one sick.

这个消息令人高兴。 **zhèi ge xiāoxi lìng rén gāoxìng**
This news makes people/one happy.

这儿的风景引人入胜。 **zhèr de fēngjǐng yǐn rén rù shèng**
The scenery here enchants one/is enchanting.

A causative construction may sometimes work in conjunction with a dative construction. The causative verb in these cases usually links with 给 **gěi** 'to give':

老奶奶倒给我一杯茶喝。 **lǎo nǚnai dào gěi wǒ yī bēi chá hē**
Grandma poured out a cup of tea for me (to drink).

老公公递给我一条毛巾擦汗。
lǎo gōnggong dì gěi wǒ yī tiáo máojīn cā hàn
Grandpa handed me a towel to wipe (my) sweat.

我朋友送给我一张照片留念。
wǒ péngyou sòng gěi wǒ yī zhāng zhàopiàn liúniàn
My friend gave me a photograph as/to be a keepsake.

6.5 Coverbs⁹

Some transitive verbs, particularly those that indicate location, destination or instrument, are used to accompany other verbs expressing more specific actions. These transitive verbs are generally known as coverbs, that is, verbs that commonly occur with other verbs. They in fact express concepts very similar to those expressed by prepositions in English, which can be seen from the English translations of the following examples. However, unlike English prepositional phrases, Chinese coverbal expressions are generally placed before the main predicate verbs:

他在图书馆借书。 **tā zài túshūguǎn jiè shū**

He borrowed a book from the library.

他到车站去坐车。 **tā dào chēzhàn qù zuò chē**

He went to the station to catch a train/bus.

她给爸爸、妈妈写信。 **tā gěi bàba | māma xiěxìn**

She wrote to her mother and father.

她跟朋友一起去看电影。 **tā gēn péngyou yìqǐ qù kàn diànyǐng**

She went with a friend/friends to see a film.

我用电脑画了一幅画儿。 **wǒ yòng diànnǎo huà le yī fú huà**

I drew a picture on my computer.

⁹ For a detailed discussion of coverbs, see See [Chapter 11](#).

6.6 Agreement between the subject and its action verb predicate

The agreement between the subject and its action verb predicate is threefold.

First is the principle of **reference agreement**. The subject of an action verb predicate in Chinese must be of definite reference. In other words, only an entity known to the participants of a communication can be featured as the initiator (or tolerator) of an action. Being a language devoid of definite or indefinite articles, Chinese uses the relative positions of items in a narrative or descriptive sentence to establish different points of reference. That is to say, all pre-verbal positions tend to be reserved for definite reference and post-verbal ones for indefinite reference.¹⁰ The following examples and their English translations will make things clear:

女主人唱了一首歌。 **nǚ zhǔrén chàng le yī shǒu gē**
The hostess sang a song.

老师在黑板上写字。 **lǎoshī zài hēibǎn shàng xiě zì**
The teacher was writing characters on the blackboard.

¹⁰ For a full discussion of reference, see [Chapter 20](#).

Second is the principle of **number agreement**. Generally speaking, most action verbs are compatible with a subject of any number, i.e. singular or plural. However, there are some action verbs that may relate only to a plural subject. For example:

他们共事了三年。 **tāmen gòngshì le sān nián**
 They worked together for three years.

大家在门口集中。 **dàjiā zài ménkǒu jízhōng**
 Everyone assembled at the entrance.

If the subject is singular, a coverbal phrase has to be introduced to indicate the involvement of another party:

他在跟她聊天。 **tā zài gēn tā liáotiān**
 He is chatting with her.

弟弟在跟妹妹吵架。 **dìdì zài gēn mèimei chǎojià**
 Younger brother is quarrelling with younger sister.

Otherwise, the rule of agreement is violated and the sentence becomes wrong:

*他通信。 **tā tōngxìn** *He corresponded.
 *她争论。 **tā zhēnglùn** *She argued.

The most common verbs of this type in the lexicon include:

接吻 **jiēwǔ** 'kiss', 见面 **jiànmiàn** 'meet', 再见 **zàijiàn** 'say goodbye to', 分手 **fēnshǒu** 'part company', 谈判 **tánpàn** 'negotiate'.

In most cases, such verbs have a first morpheme implying 'mutuality', 'collaboration' or 'coming together'. For example:

相处 **xiāngchǔ** 'deal with', 互助 **hùzhù** 'help each other', 合作 **hézuò** 'collaborate', 会面 **huìmiàn** 'meet', 联合 **liánhé** 'unite with', 团圆 **tuányuán** 'reunite (of a family)', 聚餐 **jùcān** 'come together for a meal', 交流 **jiāoliú** 'exchange views with', 对立 **duìlì** 'oppose', 商量 **shāngliang** 'consult', 并列 **bìngliè** 'list together'.

Third is the principle of **semantic or stylistic agreement**. Some action verbs are more subject-specific than others in terms of meaning or style. The

verb 啼 *tí* ‘to crow’, for example, is relatable in meaning only to roosters and some other birds; and the verb 光临 *guānglín* ‘to honour somebody with one’s presence’ is stylistically applicable exclusively to the second person. If these semantic or stylistic principles are violated, the sentence is unacceptable:

- *他在啼。 *tā zài tí*
*He is crowing.
*我光临了。 *wǒ guānglín le*
*I am honouring (you) with my presence.

6.7 Agreement between an action verb and its object

The first agreement between an action verb and its object is **collocation**. Every action verb has a collocation range, large or small. An action verb like 遵守 *zūnshǒu* ‘to abide by’, for instance, takes only objects like 法律 *fǎlǚ* ‘laws’, 规章制度 *guīzhāng zhìdù* ‘rules and regulations’ or 诺言 *nuòyán* ‘promises’. Its collocation range is therefore comparatively small. An action verb like 吃 *chī* ‘to eat’, on the other hand, has a large collocation range in that many things are edible. But with an action verb like 打 *dǎ* ‘to hit’, the collocation range is even larger, not only because many things can be hit, but also because the verb’s collocation embraces a range of set expressions such as 打字 *dǎzì* ‘to type (words)’, 打气 *dǎqì* ‘to pump air into’, 钓鱼 *dǎyú* ‘to catch fish’, 打电话 *dà diànhuà* ‘to make a telephone call’.

This so-called collocation agreement, which is partly of a semantic and partly of a lexical nature, occurs in all languages. There is, however, an agreement between an action verb and its object in terms of rhythm,¹¹ which is peculiar to Chinese. A ‘verb + object’ expression can be invalidated, even when it conforms with grammar, meaning and collocation, if it violates a rhythmic principle. The general rule with this principle is that while a monosyllabic action verb may be followed by objects of any length, a disyllabic verb may be followed only by objects that are disyllabic or longer. For example:

- | | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| to read: | 看书 <i>kànshū</i> | 看书报 <i>kàn shūbào</i> |
| | 阅读书报 <i>yuèdú shūbào</i> | *阅读书 <i>yuèdú shū</i> |
| to return books: | 还书 <i>huán shū</i> | 还图书 <i>huán túshū</i> |
| | 归还图书 <i>guīhuán túshū</i> | *归还书 <i>guīhuán shū</i> |
| to drive: | 开车 <i>kāichē</i> | 开汽车 <i>kāi qìchē</i> |
| | 驾驶汽车 <i>jiàoshǐ qìchē</i> | *驾驶车 <i>jiàoshǐ chē</i> |

¹¹ See Chapter 26 for a wider discussion of prosodic features like these.

The difference between these rhythmic patterns is one of registral formality:

Action verbs

monosyllabic verb + monosyllabic object:	neutral
e.g. 看书 kànshū	to read
开会 kāihuì	to go to or attend a meeting
monosyllabic verb + disyllabic object:	colloquial or metaphorical
e.g. 看电影 kàn diànyǐng	to go to the cinema
开夜车 kāi yèchē	to burn the midnight oil
disyllabic verb + disyllabic object:	formal or written
e.g. 浏览书籍 liúlǎn shūjí	to read extensively
召开会议 zhàokāi huìyì	to hold or convene a meeting

6.8 Action verbs: completion and continuation

Action verbs, as we have seen, are designed primarily for narrative or descriptive purposes, and every piece of narration or description must be lodged in a time frame. English and other languages specify the time and aspect of an action verb through the so-called tense framework, which can be summarised as follows:

time	aspect
past	
present	perfect continuous
future	perfect continuous

The manipulation of time and aspect creates tenses like present perfect, past continuous or present perfect continuous, and so on.

In Chinese, the tense and aspect framework looks rather different. Tense is encoded solely by time expressions and is not reflected in the form of the verbs, while aspect is indicated as follows:

- the completion aspect by 了 *le* following the verb
- the continuation aspect by 在 *zài* preceding the verb

他写了一首诗。 *tā xiě le yī shǒu shī*
He wrote a poem. (narration)

他在写一首诗。 *tā zài xiě yī shǒu shī*
He is writing a poem. (description)

These two aspect markers have a far wider function to fulfil than merely indicating such notions as completion or continuation. In this chapter, however, we shall only focus on their aspectual significations.

6.8.1 The completion aspect

The completion aspect indicator 了 *le*, as a desemanticised particle derived from the verb 了 *liǎo* ‘to bring to completion’, is a marker in the narrative indicating that something has already taken place. The subject of the verb in a narrative, as we have seen, must be of definite reference. The object, on the other hand, can be of either reference. In general, following a verb marked by a perfect aspect 了 *le*, a noun object on its own, unqualified by a ‘numeral + measure’ phrase, will be of definite reference. Where both the subject and the object are of definite reference and are part of known information, the sentence remains incomplete unless something further is added. For example, these two sentences are incomplete:

他写完了诗 ... **tā xiě wán le shī ...**

He finished the poem ... (and then what?)

我吃了饭 ... **wǒ chī le fàn**

I ate/had my meal ... (and then what?)

but are readily completed by an additional clause:

他写完了诗就去睡觉了。¹² **tā xiě wán le shī jiù qù shuìjiào le**
(lit. He write-finish *le* then go sleep *le*)

He went to bed as soon as he finished writing the poem.

我吃完了饭就去上班了。**wǒ chī wán le fàn jiù qù shàngbān le**
(lit. I eat-finish *le* then go attend-duty *le*)

I went to work as soon as I had eaten.

¹² Note that the end-of-sentence 了 *le* functions entirely differently from the verbal suffix 了 *le* and makes the initial narrative sentence expository. See [Chapter 21](#).

A sentence is of course acceptable if the object is qualified by a numeral phrase to indicate indefinite or generic reference. For example:

他收到了三封信。**tā shōudào le sān fēng xìn**

He received three letters.

他碰见了不少老朋友。**tā pèngjiàn le bùshǎo lǎo péngyou**

He bumped into quite a few friends.

The notion of completion indicated by 了 *le* is naturally associated with past time:

他昨天收到了三封信。 **tā zuótiān shōudào le sān fēng xìn**
He received three letters yesterday.

那一年他碰见了不少老朋友。
nèi yī nián tā pèngjiàn le bùshǎo lǎo péngyou
That year he bumped into quite a few friends.

了 *le* can be used with future time only in incomplete clauses (which are resolved by further information):

明天你下了课来找我。 **míngtiān nǐ xià le kè lái zhǎo wǒ**
Come and see me when you have finished class tomorrow.

我写完了三封信就去睡觉。
wǒ xiě wán le sān fēng xìn jiù qù shuìjiào
I will go to bed when I have written three letters.

One cannot say, for example:

*明天我上了三节课。 **míngtiān wǒ shàng le sān jié kè**
*Tomorrow I will have attended three classes.

*下个礼拜你吃了三次中餐。 **xià ge lǐbài nǐ chī le sān cì zhōngcān**
*Next week you will have eaten three Chinese meals.

Negative counterparts of 了 *le* sentences are expressed by using 没有 *méiyǒu* or 没 *méi* without a quantified object.¹³

昨天我没(有)上课。 **zuótiān wǒ méi (yǒu) shàngkè**
I did not go to class yesterday.

他那天没(有)碰见老朋友。
tā nà tiān méi (yǒu) pèngjiàn lǎo péngyou
That day he did not bump into his old friend.

¹³ See §16.9.

The quantification of an object in negative sentences occurs only for contrast:

昨天我没(有)写三封信。只写了两封。
zuótiān wǒ méi (yǒu) xiě sān fēng xìn | zhǐ xiě le liǎng fēng
Yesterday I did not write three letters but only two. (lit. only wrote two)

那天我并没碰见两个老朋友。只碰见了一个。

**nèi tiān wǒ bìng méi pèngjiàn liǎng ge lǎo péngyou |
zhǐ pèngjiàn le yī ge**

I did not bump into two old friends that day but only one.
(lit. only bumped into one)

Finally, it must be pointed out that causative verbs and disyllabic dative verbs with 给 *gěi* cannot be encoded in the completion aspect:

*他逼了我撒谎。***tā bī le wǒ sāhuǎng**

*He forced me to lie.

*市长发给了他一张奖状。

shìzhǎng fāgěi le tā yī zhāng jiǎngzhuàng

*The mayor awarded him a certificate of merit.

6.8.2 *The continuation aspect*

The continuation aspect marker 在 *zài* is placed before the verb, and the action indicated can be ongoing, continual or repetitive. In all cases, the continuation aspect makes the sentence descriptive.

他们在唱歌。**tāmen zài chànggē**

They are singing.

这几天他们都在研究这个问题。

zhèi jǐ tiān tāmen dōu zài yánjiū zhèi ge wèntí

They have all been studying this question for the last few days.

他们在调查情况。**tāmen zài diàochá qíngkuàng**

They are investigating the situation.

演员们在排演。**yǎnyuánmen zài páiyǎn**

The performers are rehearsing.

The notion of continuation can be further emphasised by the addition of 正 *zhèng* before 在 *zài*:

上星期天下午我正在看球赛。

shàng xīngqī tiān xiàwǔ wǒ zhèngzài kàn qiú sài

Last Sunday afternoon I was just watching a match.

她正在接电话。**tā zhèngzài jiē diànhuà**

She is just taking a call.

明年这个时候，我们正在度假。

míngnián zhèi ge shíhou | wǒmen zhèngzài dùjià

This time next year we will (just) be on holiday.

河水正在上涨。**héshuǐ zhèngzài shàngzhǎng**

The river water is (just) rising.

Adding 呢 *ne* at the end of a sentence also indicates the continuation aspect (with or without the marker 在 *zài* or 正 *zhèng*) but adds a rhetorical tone to the utterance:

外面在下雨呢。**wàimian zài xiàyǔ ne**

(Don't you know) it's raining [outside].

孩子们正睡觉呢。**háizimen zhèng shuìjiào ne**

(Can't you see) the children are sleeping.

别吵他。他准备明天的考试呢。

bié chǎo tā | tā zhǔnbèi míngtiān de kǎoshì ne

Don't disturb him. (Can't you see) he is preparing for tomorrow's exam.

In contrast, with completion aspect, a noun object following a verb with the continuation aspect will be generally of indefinite reference, whether or not it is qualified by a 'numeral + measure' phrase, and there is no question of a sentence with an unqualified object sounding incomplete. For example:

他在写诗。**tā zài xiěshī** He is writing poems.

他在写一首诗。**tā zài xiě yī shǒu shī** He is writing a poem.

学生在做作业。**xuésheng zài zuò zuòyè**

The students are doing their coursework.

姐姐在编织一件毛衣。**jiějie zài biānzhī yī jiàn máoyī**

(My) elder sister is knitting a woollen sweater.

This aspectual function of 在 *zài* is thought to derive from its use as a coverb in locational phrases like 在这儿 *zài zhèr* 'at this place; here', 在那儿 *zài nàr* 'at that place; there', 在家 *zài jiā* 'at home', 在学校 *zài xuéxiào* 'at school'. This may explain why the presence of a coverbal 在 *zài* phrase with a specified location also expresses continuous action:

有许多人在沙滩上晒太阳。

yǒu xǔduō rén zài shātān shàng shài tàiyáng

Lots of people are sunbathing on the beach.

小猫在火炉前打瞌睡。 **xiǎo māo zài huǒlú qián dǎ kēshuì**
The kitten is dozing in front of the fire.

Continuation aspect, unlike completion aspect, is naturally associated with any time: past, present and future:

他现在正在洗澡。 **tā xiànzài zhèngzài xǐzǎo**
He is taking a bath at the moment.

那时候她在读博士学位。 **nà shíhou tā zài dú bóshì xuéwèi**
At that time she was reading for her Ph.D. degree.

昨天晚上他们在打扑克(牌)。
zuótiān wǎnshang tāmen zài dǎ pūkè (pái)
They were playing cards last night.

明年这个时候，我们在度假。
míngnián zhèi ge shíhou | wǒmen zài dùjià
This time next year we will be on holiday.

The negation of the continuation aspect is usually effected by the use of 不 **bù** with 在 **zài** (but not 正在 **zhèngzài**):

上星期天下午我不在看球赛。
shàng xīngqī tiān xiàwǔ wǒ bù zài kàn qiú sài
I wasn't watching a match last Sunday afternoon.

她不在接电话。 **tā bù zài jiē diànhuà**
She isn't taking a call.

明年这个时候，我们不在度假。
míngnián zhèi ge shíhou | wǒmen bù zài dùjià
We won't be on holiday this time next year.

河水不在上涨。 **héshuǐ bù zài shàngzhǎng**
The river water isn't rising.

6.9 Action verbs: manner described and experience explained

There are two other verbal indicators that are often used with action verbs. They are 着 **zhe** and 过 **guo**. It is a common misunderstanding that they, like 了 **le** and 在 **zài**, are also aspectual markers. In fact, they have entirely different functions to serve. 着 **zhe** is suffixed to an action verb so that the resultant verbal phrase is used as a descriptive element in sentences to indicate

‘manner of existence’, ‘manner of movement’ or ‘accompanying manner’, whereas 过 *guo* is attached to an action verb in order to explain that what has happened is part of the speaker’s past experience. The explanatory function of 过 *guo* gives the sentence, in which it occurs, an expository tone.

6.9.1 *Manner of existence with 着 zhe*

Action verbs suffixed with the manner indicator 着 *zhe* constitute descriptive sentences indicating particular manner of existence:

Location expression + verb + 着 *zhe* + numeral and measure phrase + noun

天空中飘着几朵白云。 *tiānkōng zhōng piāo zhe jǐ duǒ bái yún*

(lit. sky in float-in-the-air *zhe* several mw white clouds)

A few patches of white clouds were floating in the sky.

炉子里烤着一只鸭子。 *lúzi li kǎo zhe yī zhī yāzi*

(lit. oven in roast *zhe* one mw duck)

A duck is being roasted in the oven.

屋子里亮着灯火。 *wūzi li liàng zhe dēnghuǒ*

(lit. room in bright *zhe* lamp-fire)

A light is/was shining in the room.

这个将军胸前挂着不少勋章。

zhèi ge jiāngjūn xiōng qián guà zhe bùshǎo xūnzhāng

(lit. this mw general chest front hang *zhe* not-a-few medals)

On the front of this general’s coat were hanging quite a few medals.

6.9.2 *Persistent posture or continuous movement with 着 zhe*

Action verbs with 着 *zhe* may be used after the aspect marker 在 *zài* or a 在 *zài* phrase to indicate persistent posture/state or continuous movement:

Noun + 在 *zài* (phrase) + verb + 着 *zhe*

游客们在海滩上躺着。 *yóukèmen zài hǎitān shàng tǎng zhe*

(lit. tourists *zài* beach on lie *zhe*)

The tourists were lying on the beach.

他们在树林里走着。 *tāmen zài shùlín li zǒu zhe*

(lit. they *zài* woods in walk *zhe*)

They were walking in the woods.

篝火在熊熊地燃烧着。gōuhuǒ zài xióngxióng de ránshāo zhe
(lit. bonfire **zai** brightly **de** burn **zhe**)
The bonfire was burning brightly.

风在不停地刮着。fēng zài bù tíng de guā zhe
(lit. wind **zai** non-stop **de** blow **zhe**)
The wind was blowing incessantly.

6.9.3 Accompanying manner with 着 zhe

A verb phrase marked by 着 *zhe* describing accompanying manner may occur within any type of sentence. With its specifying function, it always comes before the main verb. Here are some examples:

他笑着朝我走了过来。tā xiào zhe cháo wǒ zǒu le guòlai
(lit. he smile **zhe** cv:towards me walk **le** over-come)
He walked towards me smiling.

孩子流着眼泪向妈妈认错。háizi liú zhe yǎnlèi xiàng māma rèn cuò
(lit. child flow **zhe** tears towards mother admit wrong)
The child with tears in his eyes admitted to his mother that he was wrong.

护士蹑着脚走近了病床。hùshi niè zhe jiǎo zǒu jìn le bìngchuáng
(lit. nurse tiptoe **zhe** foot walk near **le** illness-bed)
The nurse tiptoed towards the patient's bed.

小狗摇着尾巴跑了过来。xiǎo gǒu yáo zhe wěiba pǎo le guòlai
(lit. small dog shake **zhe** tail run **le** across-come)
The puppy came over wagging its tail.

他低着头坐在那儿。tā dī zhe tóu zuò zài nàr
(lit. he lower **zhe** head sit cv:at there)
He was sitting there with his head lowered.

Two consecutive 着 *zhe* expressions of this type indicate that the action is continued or repeated:

她说说着说着哭了起来。tā shuō zhe shuō zhe kū le qǐlai
(lit. she speak **zhe** speak **zhe** weep **le** begin)
As she spoke, she started to weep.

她哭着哭着昏了过去。 **tā kū zhe kū zhe hūn le guòqu**
 (lit. she weep **zhe** weep **zhe** faint le over)
 She wept and wept and finally fainted.

6.9.4 Experience and 过 *guo*

The presence of 过 *guo* following an action verb conveys the meaning that the action of the verb is something that has been experienced in the past, and the tone of the sentence is therefore expository:

我看过那本小说。 **wǒ kàn guo nèi běn xiǎoshuō**
 I have read that novel.

他们已经去过中国三次。 **tāmen yǐjīng qù guo zhōngguó sān cì**
 They have already been to China three times.

我以前来过这儿。 **wǒ yǐqián lái guo zhèr**
 I've been here before.

The past experience may relate to a specified time:

我年轻的时候写过不少诗。
wǒ niánqīng de shíhòu xiě guo bùshǎo shī
 I wrote a lot of poems when I was young.

她的女儿两年前当过导游。
tāde nǚ'ér liǎng nián qián dāng guo dǎoyóu
 Her daughter worked as a tourist guide two years ago.

The negator for verbs with 过 *guo* is 没(有) *méi(yǒu)*:

我没(有)吃过中国菜。 **wǒ méi(yǒu) chī guo zhōngguó cài**
 (lit. I not (have) eat **guo** Chinese dishes)
 I have never eaten Chinese food.

你喝过绍兴酒没有? **nǐ hē guo shàoxīng jiǔ méiyǒu?**
 Have you ever had Shaoxing (rice) wine?

The difference in function between 过 *guo* and the aspect marker 了 *le* is that, while the former explains an experience, the latter narrates an event. Compare the following sentences:

他去了中国没有? **tā qù le zhōngguó méiyǒu**
 Did he go/Has he gone to China?

他去过中国没有? **tā qù guo zhōngguó méiyǒu**
Has he (ever) been to China?

你见了他没有? **nǐ jiàn le tā méiyǒu**
Did you see/Have you seen him?

你见过他没有? **nǐ jiàn guo tā méiyǒu**
Have you (ever) met him before?

他那年参加了马拉松。 **tā nèi nián cānjiā le mǎlāsōng**
He ran the marathon that year.

他以前参加过马拉松。 **tā yǐqián cānjiā guo mǎlāsōng**
He has run the marathon before.

If the object is a common noun, it is always definite reference in a verb + 了 *le* sentence and indefinite in a verb + 过 *guo* sentence:

你查了字典没有? **nǐ chá le zìdiǎn méiyǒu**
Have you consulted the dictionary?

你查过字典没有? **nǐ chá guo zìdiǎn méiyǒu**
Have you ever consulted a dictionary?

Finally, 过 *guo* is less commonly attached to verbs that are not action verbs. This normally occurs when the reference is to a previous situation that subsequently changed:

我曾经有过钱。 **wǒ céngjīng yǒu guo qián**
(lit. I at one time have *guo* money) I was very rich at one time.

前年他身体好过一阵子。 **qián nián tā shēntǐ hǎo guo yīzhènzǐ**
The year before last his health did improve for a while.

Chapter 7

Action verbs and time

As Chinese action verbs do not change morphologically for tense, the time concept associated with them is therefore encoded in terms of time expressions. The positioning of these time expressions, whether pre-verbal or post-verbal, depends on whether they refer to definite or indefinite time. **Point-of-time** expressions are by nature of definite reference and are therefore always featured in a pre-verbal position. **Duration** or **frequency** expressions, on the other hand, in that their purpose is to measure *how long* or *how often* an action has been carried out, are likely to be of indefinite reference, and therefore follow the verb. They are moved to a pre-verbal position only when a period of time or number of times serves as the time backdrop against which a particular action encoded in a verb is supposed to be taking place.

7.1 Point of time

Point-of-time expressions refer to the particular time in or at which an action takes place, and they are by their very nature of definite reference. For Chinese speakers, the time reference has to be established before the action of the verb is stated, and point-of-time expressions are therefore positioned either at the beginning of the sentence or immediately after the subject.

昨天我去商场买东西。

zuótiān wǒ qù shāngchǎng mǎi dōngxi

Yesterday I went to the shop to buy some things.

他今天没(有)来。

tā jīntiān méi (yǒu) lái

He has not come today.

去年冬天这儿下了一场大雪。

qùnián dōngtiān zhèr xià le yī chǎng dà xuě

There was a heavy snowfall here last winter.

我下午三点半在大学门口等你。

wǒ xiàwǔ sān diǎn bàn zài dàxué ménkǒu děng nǐ

I will wait for you at half past three this afternoon at the entrance to the university.

In contrast with English, point-of-time expressions in Chinese follow the order of year, month, day, week, part of the day, hour, minute and second; that is, the larger unit always precedes the smaller one:

一九八七年六月五日星期五上午九时四十三分二十一秒

yī jiǔ bā qī nián liù yuè wǔ rì xīngqī wǔ shàngwǔ jiǔ shí sìshí sān fēn èrshí yī miǎo

21 seconds after 9:43 on the morning of Friday, 5 June 1987

我明天下午两点二十分来。

wǒ míngtiān xiàwǔ liǎng diǎn èrshí fēn lái

I'll come at twenty past two tomorrow afternoon.

Duration or frequency expressions usually come after the verb,¹ but they are placed in a pre-verbal position, when they are posed, often in a contrastive sense, for particular comment or action. As such, they take on definite reference and in effect become point-of-time expressions:

那两天他没上过街。

nà/nèi liǎng tiān tā méi shàng guo jiē

He did not go out for those two days.

明年头两个月我要到北京去学习。

míngnián tóu liǎng ge yuè wǒ yào dào běijīng qù xuéxí

I am going to study in Beijing for the first two months next year.

头三次我们都输了。 **tóu sān cì wǒmen dōu shū le**

The first three times we lost.

¹ See §§7.2 and 7.4 below.

As we can see from these examples, a duration or frequency expression used in this way is usually preceded by a demonstrative or specifying adjective. A duration expression may also be followed by the word 来 lái 'till now', which confirms that it indicates point of time:

这一年来
两个月来

zhèi yī nián lái
liǎng ge yuè lái

in this last year
in the last two months

Action verbs
and time

7.2 Duration

Duration expressions refer to the length of time a particular action lasts. Logically speaking, the duration will not become known until the action concerned has taken place and it will naturally be of indefinite reference. A duration expression therefore is normally positioned post-verbally as a complement.

我们在巴黎待了一个星期。

wǒmen zài bālí dāi le yī ge xīngqī

We stayed in Paris for a week.

会议继续了一个多小时。

huìyì jìxù le yī ge duō xiǎoshí

The meeting continued for over an hour.

我们要等多长时间？

wǒmen yào děng duōshǎo shíjiān

How long will we have to wait?

If the verb is a transitive verb with an inanimate object or an intransitive verb with an internal ‘verb + object’ structure, the duration expression is positioned between the verb and the object. Grammatically, the duration expression is now no longer a complement of the verb in question but an attributive to the noun object. Under such circumstances, the attributive indicator 的 *de* may be optionally incorporated:

我学了两年(的)中文。

wǒ xué le liǎng nián (de) zhōngwén

I studied Chinese for two years.

我们跳了三个小时(的)舞。

wǒmen tiào le sān ge xiǎoshí (de) wǔ

We danced for three hours.

我们聊了一个晚上(的)天。

wǒmen liáo le yī ge wǎnshang (de) tiān

We chatted for a whole evening.

If the object is a human or other animate being or is a pronoun, the duration complement comes after the noun object:

警察盘问了那个小偷三天三夜。

jǐngchá pánwèn le nèi ge xiǎotōu sān tiān sān yè

The police interrogated that petty thief for three days and nights.

校长训了那个调皮的小学生半个钟头。

xiàozhǎng xùn le nèi ge tiáopí de xiǎoxuésheng bàn ge zhōngtóu

The headteacher gave a telling-off to that mischievous pupil for half an hour.

爸爸在经济上支持了我两年。

bàba zài jīngjì shàng zhīchí le wǒ liǎng nián

Father supported me financially for two years.

However, if the focus is divided between the object and the duration, that is, if the construction is bifocal, the verb is repeated after the verb-object and the duration complement comes after the repeated verb:

我们跳舞(就)跳了三个小时。

wǒmen tiàowǔ (jiù) tiào le sān ge xiǎoshí

We (actually) danced for three hours.

我们(光是)聊天(就)聊了一个晚上。

wǒmen (guāng shì) liáotiān (jiù) liáo le yī ge wǎnshang

We simply chatted the whole evening.

校长训那个调皮的学生训了半个钟头。

xiàozhǎng xùn nèi ge tiáopí de xuésheng xùn le bàn ge zhōngtóu

The headteacher gave a telling-off to that mischievous pupil for (all of) half an hour.

爸爸在经济上支持我支持了两年。

bàba zài jīngjì shàng zhīchí wǒ zhīchí le liǎng nián

Father gave me financial support for (a period of) two years.

A range of duration expressions is given below. It is important to note that some of them take the measure word 个 *gè* when associated with numerals, while others do not. This stems from the fact that in some cases the duration expressions are derived from original nouns, while in others they are measures themselves.

duration expression	with or without measure word 个 gè	example	English translation
年 nián 'year'	—	一年 yī nián	one year
月 yuè 'month'	+	两个月 liáng ge yuè	two months
日 rì 'day' (class.)	—	三日 sān rì	three days
天 tiān 'day' (colloq.)	—	三天 sān tiān	three days
星期 xīngqī 'week' (neut.)	±	四(个)星期 sì (ge) xīngqī	four weeks
礼拜 lǐbài 'week' (infml.)	+	四个礼拜 sì ge lǐbài	four weeks
小时 xiǎoshí 'hour' (neut.)	±	半(个)小时 bàn (ge) xiǎoshí	half an hour
钟头 zhōngtóu 'hour' (infml.)	+	半个钟头 bàn ge zhōngtóu	half an hour
刻(钟) kè (zhōng) 'quarter of an hour'	—	一刻(钟) yī kè (zhōng)	a quarter of an hour
分钟 fēn zhōng 'minute'	—	五分钟 wǔ fēn zhōng	five minutes
秒(钟) miǎo (zhōng) 'second'	—	六秒(钟) liù miǎo (zhōng)	six seconds
上午 shàngwǔ 'morning'	+	整个上午 zhěng ge shàngwǔ	the whole morning
中午 zhōngwǔ 'noon'	+	两个中午 liǎng ge zhōngwǔ	two noons
下午 xiàwǔ 'afternoon'	+	半个下午 bàn ge xiàwǔ	half the afternoon
晚上 wǎnshang 'evening'	+	整个晚上 zhěng ge wǎnshang	the whole evening
夜 yè 'night'	—	整夜 zhěng yè	the whole night

7.3 Brief duration

Brief duration expressions take a few specific forms in Chinese. They indicate short periods of time and are generally placed after the verb like other duration expressions. They are associated with the numeral 一 *yī* 'one', and the two most common are: 一会儿 *yīhuìr* 'a little while' and 一下 *yīxià* 'briefly, a bit'. The difference between the two expressions is that the former focuses on the duration, while the latter focuses on the action itself. For example:

在他家坐了一会儿。 **wǒ zài tā jiā zuò le yīhuìr**

I sat for a while in his place.

他随随便便地看了一下。 **tā suísuíbiànbàn de kàn le yīxià**

He casually gave it a look./He gave it a cursory glance.

If there is a nominal object in the sentence, the brief duration expression, like other duration expressions, is placed between the verb and the object:

我们聊了一会儿天。 **wǒmen liáo le yīhuìr tiān**

We chatted for a while.

她梳了一下头。 **tā shū le yīxià tóu**

She gave her hair a comb.

他们研究了一下那个问题。 **tāmen yánjiū le yīxià nèi ge wèntí**

They gave some thought to that question.

If the object is pronominal, the brief duration expression usually comes after the object:

他在胳膊上轻轻地碰了我一下。

tā zài gēbo shàng qīngqīng de pèng le wǒ yīxià

He touched me lightly on the arm.

If the object is animate, the brief duration expression may come either before or after the object:

妈妈吻了她的孩子一下。 **māma wěn le tāde háizi yīxià**

or

妈妈吻了一下她的孩子。 **māma wěn le yīxià tāde háizi**

Mother gave her child a kiss.

An alternative way to indicate brief duration is to repeat the verb. In a narrative sentence relating a past completed action, 了 *le* is inserted after

the first verb. This, however, is possible only with a monosyllabic verb.²
The verb may take an object, but, if so, only the verb is repeated:

她笑了笑。 **tā xiào le xiào**

She gave a smile.

她梳了梳头。 **tā shū le shū tóu**

She gave her hair a comb.

他在胳膊上轻轻地碰了碰我。

tā zài gēbo shàng qīngqīng de pèng le pèng wǒ

He touched me lightly on the arm.

*我们研究了研究那个问题。

wǒmen yánjiū le yánjiū nèi ge wèntí

*We gave some thought to that question.

² In a narrative sentence with 了 *le*, a disyllabic verb cannot be repeated to mean brief duration: it may use only the brief duration expression 一下 *yíxià*.

In an expository sentence, where the brief activity is habitual or regular, 了 *le* is not needed:

星期天我们常到公园里去走走。

xīngqītiān wǒmen cháng dào gōngyuán lǐ qù zǒuzou

We often go for a walk in the park on Sunday.

她每天都拿出他的照片来看一看。

tā měitiān dōu ná chū tāde zhàopiàn lái kàn yī kàn

Every day she took out his photograph to look at.

However, in questions or imperatives requiring further action, both monosyllabic and disyllabic verbs may be repeated to indicate brief duration. With disyllabic verbs, there is a simple repetition; but with monosyllabic verbs, the repetition may incorporate the numeral 一 *yī*.

咱们先休息休息。 **zánmen xiān xiūxi xiūxi**

We'll have a rest first.

咱们能好好地研究研究这个问题吗?

zánmen néng hǎohǎo de yánjiū yánjiū zhèi ge wèntí ma

Can we give some proper thought to this question?

请你等(一)等! **qǐng nǐ děng (yī) děng**

Please wait a moment!

让我看(一)看! **ràng wǒ kàn (yī) kàn**

Let me have a look!

你来尝(一)尝! **nǐ lái cháng (yī) cháng**

Come and have a taste!

你也想试(一)试吗? **nǐ yě xiǎng shì (yī) shì ma**

Would you like to have a try too?

The repetition brief duration construction also implies a degree of eagerness on the part of the speaker:

你猜猜谁来了! **nǐ cāicāi | shéi lái le**

Have a guess who's come!

你们见过面没有? 我来介绍介绍。

nǐmen jiàn guo miàn méiyǒu | wǒ lái jièshào jièshào

Have you two met before? I'll introduce you to each other.

你有空就弹弹钢琴吧。

nǐ yǒukòng jiù tántán gāngqín ba

Have a go on the piano when you've got time.

Involuntary action verbs or verbs that indicate actions or situations beyond one's control, however, cannot be reduplicated. For example, one cannot say:

*你害怕害怕! **nǐ hàipà hàipà** *Be afraid!

Nor can brief duration reduplication occur with a negative:

*不要哭哭! **bù yào kūkū** *Don't cry!

*别动动! **bié dòngdòng** *Don't move!

7.4 Frequency

Frequency expressions in Chinese are generally monosyllabic. They refer to the number of times an action takes place, and like duration expressions, become known only when the action has taken place. They therefore naturally come after the verb, and the most common are: 次 **cì**, 回 **huí**, 遍 **biàn** and 趟 **tàng**. They all mean 'time(s)', but 遍 **biàn** implies 'from beginning to end' and 趟 **tàng** refers to 'trips or journeys'.

这个问题我们讨论了两次。

zhèi ge wèntí wǒmen tāolùn le liǎng cì

We discussed this question twice.

那篇课文我复习了三遍。

nèi piān kèwén wǒ fùxí le sān biàn

I revised that lesson three times.

那个人我见过几回。³ **nèi ge rén wǒ jiàn guo jǐ huí**
I have met that man a few times.

北京我去过两趟。**běijīng wǒ qù guo liǎng tàng**
I have been to Beijing twice.

³ 过 *guo* ‘have had the experience of’ is an expository indicator. See §6.9.4.

If the verb, whether transitive or intransitive, has a nominal object, the frequency expression, like a duration expression, will generally have to go between the verb and the object:

我们见过两次面。**wǒmen jiàn guo liǎng cì miàn**
We have met twice.

我复习了三遍课文。**wǒ fùxí le sān biàn kèwén**
I revised the lesson three times.

If the object is a location, the frequency expression may go before or after it:

我去过两趟北京。**wǒ qù guo liǎng tàng běijīng**
我去过北京两趟。**wǒ qù guo běijīng liǎng tàng**
I've been to Beijing twice.

If the object is a pronoun or a human noun, the frequency expression must follow it:

我见过他两次。**wǒ jiàn guo tā liǎng cì**
I have met him twice.

他们拜访了他们的老师三趟。
tāmen bài fǎng le tāmen de lǎoshī sān tàng
They visited their teacher three times.

*我见过两次他。**wǒ jiàn guo liǎng cì tā**
*I have met him twice.

*他们拜访了三趟他们的老师。
tāmen bài fǎng le sān tàng tāmen de lǎoshī
*They have visited their teacher three times.

7.5 每 *měi* ‘every’

The adjective 每 *měi* ‘every’, like a numeral, indicates exclusive time reference, and it precedes a time noun with or without a measure

word.⁴ 每 *měi* is positioned pre-verbally, either at the beginning of the sentence or immediately after the subject, and it is often echoed by the monosyllabic adverb 都 *dōu* ‘in every instance’, which comes immediately before the verb:

我每天都去上课。

wǒ měitiān dōu qù shàngkè

I go to class every day.

李家每年都去瑞士旅游。

lǐ jiā měi nián dōu qù ruìshì lǚyóu

The Li family goes touring in Switzerland every year.

她每个星期都买彩券。

tā měi ge xīngqī dōu mǎi cǎiquàn

She buys lottery tickets every week.

⁴ See the table of time nouns in §7.2 on duration.

7.6 Other time expressions

In previous sections, we have looked at point of time, specified duration, brief duration, frequency and exclusive repetition. There are, however, other nonspecific time expressions that are adverbial rather than nominal and indicate concepts like ‘immediately’, ‘gradually’, ‘punctually’, ‘all along’, ‘constantly’, ‘always’, ‘regularly’, ‘already’, ‘finally’, ‘suddenly’, and so on. These adverbs are invariably placed before the verb:⁵

⁵ Most of these adverbs can be used in all types of sentence, but some, specifying point of time, are by definition found most commonly in narrative sentences, and others, implying change or passage of time, will tend to occur more often in expository sentences. See Chapter 20 on sentence types.

他马上赶去学校。

(narrative)

tā mǎshàng gǎn qù xuéxiào

He immediately hurried off to school.

孩子渐渐长大了。

(le-expository)

háizi jiànjiàn zhǎngdà le

The child gradually grew up.

他们如期到达目的地。

(narrative)

tāmen rúqī dàodá mùdìdì

They reached their destination on time.

她是素食者，从(来)不吃肉。⁶

(expository)

tā shì sùshízhě | cóng (lái) bù chī ròu

She is a vegetarian and has never

(all along not) eaten meat.

我们无时无刻不在想念他。

(descriptive)

wǒmen wúshí wúkè bù zài xiǎngniàn tā

We think about him all the time/constantly.

我永远记住您的话。

(expository)

wǒ yǒngyuǎn jìzhù nín de huà

I'll always remember your words/what you said.

我女儿经常来探望我们。

(expository)

wǒ nǚ'ér jīncháng lái tànwàng wǒmen

My daughter regularly comes to visit us.

他已经离开上海了⁷。tā yǐjīng líkāi shànghǎi le

(le-expository)

He has already left Shanghai.

他们终于成功了。

(le-expository)

tāmen zhōngyú chénggōng le

They were successful in the end.

奶奶突然晕倒了⁸。

(le-expository)

nǎinai tūrán yūndǎo le

(narrative)

Grandma suddenly fainted.

⁶ Time adverbs like 从来 cónglái and 向来 xiànglái 'all along, always' are invariably followed by negators like 不 bù 'not', etc.

⁷ Its narrative counterpart, strictly speaking can be (那时候)他已经离开了上海。(nèi shíhòu) tā yǐjīng líkāi le shànghǎi 'By that time) he had already left Shanghai.'

⁸ Here, 了 le not only ends the sentence but also comes right after the main verb. The sentence may therefore also be regarded as a narrative.

Similar adverbs include:

已经 yǐjīng 'already', 常常 chángcháng 'often', 立刻 lìkè 'immediately', 立即 lìjì 'at once', 及时 jíshí 'in time', 赶快 gǎnkuài 'in a hurry', 逐渐 zhújiàn 'gradually', 慢慢 mànman 'slowly', 临时 línshí 'temporarily', 预先 yùxiān 'in advance', 首先 shǒuxiān 'first of all', 准时 zhǔnshí 'on time', 按时 ànshí 'on schedule', 一再 yīzài 'again and again', 一向 yīxiàng 'all along', 不断 bùduàn 'constantly', 一直 yīzhí 'always, all along', 随时 suíshí 'at any time', 曾经 céngjīng 'at one time', 刚刚 gānggāng 'just now', 接着 jiēzhe 'after that', 就要 jiùyào 'soon'.

7.7 Negation and time reference

In Chinese, the particular negator used to negate an action verb is often determined with reference to time and intention.

There are two negators of action verbs in Chinese: 不 **bù** and 没(有) **méi(yǒu)**. 不 **bù** mainly negates habitual and intended action, while 没(有) **méi(yǒu)** indicates that an action has not taken place or been completed. In general, this means that 不 **bù** is largely associated with expository sentences and 没(有) **méi(yǒu)** with narrative sentences.

7.7.1 Negative expository sentences

不 **bù** negating habitual actions (past, present or future):

他常常不上班。

tā chángcháng bù shàngbān

He often doesn't go to work.

他以前常常不上班。

tā yǐqián chángcháng bù shàngbān

In the past he often didn't go to work.

我怕他将来也常常不上班。

wǒ pà tā jiānglái yě chángcháng bù shàngbān

I'm afraid in the future he won't often go to work.

不 **bù** as a negator of intention and future action:

我明天不去开会。

wǒ míngtiān bù qù kāihuì

I will not go to the meeting tomorrow.

我不买那么贵的书。 **wǒ bù mǎi nàme guì de shū**

I won't buy a book as expensive as that.

Note that with unintentional actions 不 **bù** cannot be used:

*明天不下雨。⁹ **míngtiān bù xià yǔ**

*It will not rain tomorrow.

⁹ In a conditional clause, however, 不 **bù** may be used to indicate possibility rather than intention, and hence it is correct to say: 如果明天不下雨, 球赛照常进行。 **rúguǒ míngtiān bù xià yǔ | qiú sài zhàocháng jìnxíng** 'The match will go ahead tomorrow as scheduled if it doesn't rain'.

7.7.2 Negative narrative sentences

Action verbs
and time

没(有) **méi(yǒu)** negates action that has not taken place:

他昨天没(有)来。

tā zuótiān méi(yǒu) lái

He did not come yesterday.

我们没(有)在那儿住两个月。

wǒmen méi (yǒu) zài nàr zhù liǎng ge yuè

We did not stay there for two months.

那天她没(有)吃三次药。

nèi tiān tā méi (yǒu) chī sān cì yào

That day she did not take her three doses of medicine.

If a past action did not take place as a result of deliberate non-action on the part of the subject, the negator 不 **bù** is used. A sentence like this is in fact expository:

他昨天(故意)不来。

tā zuótiān (gùyì) bù lái

He (deliberately) would not come yesterday.

那年我们不(打算)在那儿住两个月。

nèi nián wǒmen bù (dǎsuan) zài nàr zhù liǎng ge yuè

That year we would not (i.e. we had no intention to) stay there for two months.

那天她(决定)不吃三次药。

nèi tiān tā (juéding) bù chī sān cì yào

That day she would not (i.e. she was determined not to) take her three doses of medicine.

没(有) **méi(yǒu)** also occurs in expository sentences in particular circumstances:

(a) with the experiential verb suffix 过 **guo**:

我没(有)看过那本小说。

wǒ méi(yǒu) kàn guo nài běn xiǎoshuō

I haven't read that novel.

他们没(有)去过美国。

tāmen méi(yǒu) qù guo měiguó

They have not been to America.

(b) in conjunction with the adverb 还 *hái* 'still, yet':

我还没(有)写完我的论文。

wǒ hái méi(yǒu) xiě wán wǒ de lùnwén

I haven't finished my thesis yet.

他们还没(有)作出决定。

tāmen hái méi(yǒu) zuò chū juéding

They still have not come to a decision.

7.7.3 *Negative descriptive sentences*

In descriptive sentences that are characterised by the presence of the continuation aspect marker 在 *zài*, 不 *bù* is normally used, but 没(有) *méi(yǒu)* also occurs, particularly when the reference is to a past unrealised action. The difference between them is that 没(有) *méi(yǒu)* is simply factual and objective, while 不 *bù* implies a degree of intention:

昨天上午我没(有)在打球。

zuótiān shàngwǔ wǒ méi(yǒu) zài dǎqiú

or

昨天上午我不在打球。

zuótiān shàngwǔ wǒ bù zài dǎqiú

I wasn't playing any ball games yesterday morning.

In fact, the distinction between these two sentences is that the first is descriptive and the second expository.

Chapter 8

Action verbs and locations

Actions may be associated not only with time but also with location. In this chapter, we will look at the ways in which expressions of location, direction and destination in Chinese are linked with action verbs.

8.1 Location expressions and position indicators

In Chinese, location expressions are usually formed by placing one of the **position indicators** listed below after a noun. These position indicators have monosyllabic and disyllabic alternatives, and the monosyllabic ones are known as postpositions (as opposed to prepositions). The disyllabic (and polysyllabic; see the second table below) forms can be location expressions in their own right.

meaning	postpositions colloq.	+ 面 mian colloq.	+ 进 bian neut.	+ 头 tou more colloq.	+ 方 fāng fml.
above; on	上 shàng	上面 shàngmian	上边 shàngbian	上头 shàngtou	上方 shàngfāng
below; under	下 xià	下面 xiàmiàn	下边 xiàbian	下头 xiàtou	下方 xiàfāng
inside; in	里 ¹ lǐ	里面 lǐmian	里边 lǐbian	里头 lǐtou	
outside	外 wài	外面 wàimian	外边 wàibian	外头 wàitou	
before; in front	前 qián	前面 qiánmian	前边 qiánbian	前头 qiántou	
behind	后 hòu	后面 hòumian	后边 hòubian	后头 hòutou	
left-hand side		左面 zuǒmian	左边 zuǒbian		左方 zuǒfāng
right-hand side		右面 yòumian	右边 yòubian		右方 yòufāng

¹ There is a classical equivalent of 里 **lǐ**, 内 **nèi**, which is generally used with more abstract notions, e.g. 范围内 **fànwéi nèi** ‘within the scope’.

In addition there are: 旁 páng/旁边 pángbian ‘by the side of’, 边 bian ‘at the edge of’, 底下 dīxia ‘directly under’, 中 zhōng/中间 zhōngjiān ‘in the middle of’, 对面 duìmiàn ‘opposite’, 附近 fùjìn ‘nearby’, 隔壁 gébì ‘next door to’, 四周 sìzhōu/周围 zhōuwéi ‘all round’, 之间 zhī jiān ‘among, between’.

For larger areas like a country, a city, etc., there are the following additional possibilities:

meaning	+ 部 bù neut.	+ 面 mian neut.	+ 边 bian colloq.	+ 方 fāng fml.
east of	东部 dōngbù	东面 dōngmian	东边 dōngbian	东方 dōngfāng
south of	南部 nánbù	南面 nánmian	南边 nánbian	南方 nánfāng
west of	西部 xībù	西面 xīmian	西边 xībian	西方 xīfāng
north of	北部 běibù	北面 běimian	北边 běibian	北方 běifāng
southeast of	东南部 dōngnánbù	东南面 dōngnánmian	东南边 dōngnánbian	东南方 dōngnánfāng
northeast of	东北部 dōngběibù	东北面 dōngběimian	东北边 dōngběibian	东北方 dōngběifāng
southwest of	西南部 xīnánbù	西南面 xīnánmian	西南边 xīnánbian	西南方 xīnánfāng
northwest of	西北部 xībēibù	西北面 xībēimian	西北边 xībēibian	西北方 xībēifāng

The position indications with 部 bù mean ‘in the east of’, ‘in the south of’, etc., while those with 面 mian, 边 bian and 方 fāng mean ‘to the east of’, ‘to the south of’, etc.

Here are some examples of location expressions:

桌子上	zhuōzi shàng	on the table
桌子上面	zhuōzi shàngmian	
桌子上边	zhuōzi shàngbian	
桌子上头	zhuōzi shàngtou	
桌子上方	zhuōzi shàngfāng	
树下	shù xià	under the tree
树下面	shù xiàmiàn	
树下边	shù xiàbian	
树下头	shù xiàtou	
树底下	shù dīxia	
屋子里	wūzi lǐ	in the room
屋子里面	wūzi lǐmian	

屋子里边	wūzi lǐbian	
屋子里头	wūzi lǐtou	
湖旁	hú páng	by the side of the lake
湖旁边	hú pángbian	
湖边	hú bian	
中国东部	zhōngguó dōngbù	in the east of China
中国东方	zhōngguó dōngfāng	to the east of China
中国东面	zhōngguó dōngmian	
中国东边	zhōngguó dōngbian	
大学对面	dàxué duìmiàn	opposite the university
商店附近	shāngdiàn fùjìn	near the shop
两棵树之间	liǎng kē shù zhījiān	between the two trees
公园四周	gōngyuán sìzhōu	all round the park

8.2 在 zài with location expressions

To indicate location, the preposition or coverb² 在 zài ‘(exist) in or at’ usually combines with a location expression.

The 在 zài coverbal phrase can be positioned earlier or later in a sentence depending on the meaning it contracts with the verb. It comes before the verb if the initiator of the action (usually the subject) has to be at a particular location before the action can be carried out, and it is placed post-verbally if the location indicates the position a particular being or object reaches following the action expressed in the verb. In other words, a pre-verbal location expression is usually concerned with the whereabouts of the subject (the initiator of the action) and a post-verbal location expression is more often than not concerned with the whereabouts of the object (which is usually topicalised).³ We will discuss the complemental (post-verbal) use of location expressions in §8.4 below, but here we are concerned with the adverbial use of location expressions with 在 zài, which come between the subject and the verb:

学生们都在图书馆(里)看书。

xuéshengmen dōu zài túshūguǎn (lǐ) kànshū

The students are all reading in the library.

² Coverbs have already been mentioned in §6.5 and they will be discussed in detail in Chapter 11.

³ The object is regularly brought forward before the verb or topicalised through use of the 把 bǎ or notional passive construction, see Chapters 12 and 13.

运动员们在操场上跑步。

yùndòngyuánmen zài cāochǎng shàng pǎobù

The athletes are running on the sportsground.

有不少人在海里游泳。

yǒu bùshǎo rén zài hǎi lǐ yóuyóǒng

There are quite a few people swimming in the sea.

雪花在空中飞舞。

xuěhuā zài kōng zhōng fēiwǔ

The snowflakes are dancing in the air.

我在旧书店外边碰见了一个老朋友。

wǒ zài jiù shūdiàn wàibiān pèngjiàn le yī ge lǎo péngyou

I bumped into an old friend outside the second-hand bookshop.

有许多外国商人在中国东南部建立了企业。

yǒu xǔduō wàiguó shāng rén zài zhōngguó dōngnánbù jiànli le qǐyè

Many foreign traders set up businesses in southeast China.

If the main verb is monosyllabic or does not have an object, the descriptive marker 着 *zhe* will have to be added to obtain a disyllabic rhythm:⁴

鸟儿在树上吱吱喳喳地叫着。

niǎor zài shù shàng zhīzhīzhāzhā de jiào zhe

The birds are chattering in the trees.

小猫在火炉旁睡着。

xiǎo māo zài huǒlú páng shuì zhe

The kitten is dozing beside the stove.

洗好的衣服都在晾衣绳上晾着。

xǐ hǎo de yīfu dōu zài liàngyīshéng shàng liàng zhe

The clothes are drying on the line.

金鱼在鱼缸里不停地游着。

jīnyú zài yúgāng lǐ bùtíng de yóu zhe

The goldfish swims unceasingly round its tank/bowl.

有两个卫兵在门口(旁)⁵站着。

yǒu liǎng ge wèibīng zài ménkǒu (páng) zhàn zhe

There are two guards standing at the entrance.

⁴ Monosyllabic rhythm may be possible in imperatives, e.g. 你在这儿等 *nǐ zài zhèr děng*, 'Would you wait here', 请在前面坐 *qǐng zài qiánmiàn zuò* 'Please sit at the front'.

⁵ Disyllabic or trisyllabic nouns may combine with 在 *zài* to form location expressions without postpositions, e.g. 在图书馆 *zài túshūguǎn* 'in the library', 在门口 *zài ménkǒu* 'at the entrance' if there is no ambiguity as to the actual whereabouts.

Though the addition of 着 *zhe* ‘exist continuously in a particular manner’ is motivated by rhythm, the sentence with its presence becomes even more descriptive. This point will be picked up again in [Chapter 21](#).

8.3 Location expressions as sentence terminators

If a location expression indicates the result of an action, it naturally comes after the verb. In other words, if a location expression emphasises the position the subject (the initiator of the action) or the topic (generally the notional object of the action) eventually reaches following the execution of the action implied in the verb, it is only natural for the location expression to come after the verb. Under such circumstances, the expression is always preceded by 在 *zài* ‘at; in; on’, etc. Location expressions as sentence terminators are particularly common with 把 *bǎ* constructions or with notional passives.⁶ For example,

他把大衣挂在衣架上。

tā bǎ dàyī guà zài yījià shàng

He hung [his] overcoat on the coat hanger/stand.

妈妈把妹妹抱在怀里。

māma bǎ mèimei bào zài huái li

Mother took/held younger sister in her arms.

爸爸把汽车停在路边。

bàba bǎ qìchē tíng zài lùbian

Father parked the car at the roadside.

钱都存在银行里。

qián dōu cún zài yínháng lǐ

The money is all deposited in the bank.

信息都存在磁盘上。

xìnxī dōu cún zài cípán shàng

The information is all stored on the disk.

游客们都躺在树荫下。

yóukèmen dōu tǎng zài shù yīn xià

The visitors all lay down in the shade of the tree(s).

客人们都站在房子前面。

kèrenmen dōu zhàn zài fángzi qiánmian

The guests all stood in front of the house.

⁶ See [Chapter 12](#) for 把 *bǎ* constructions and [Chapter 13](#) for notional passives.

If the emphasis is the verb itself, the location expression becomes a coverbal phrase. For example, the last three examples may be reworded as:

信息都在磁盘上存着。 **xìnxī dōu zài cípán shàng cún zhe**

The information is being stored on the disk.

游客们都在树荫下躺着。 **yóukèmen dōu zài shù yīn xià tǎng zhe**

The visitors are all lying in the shade of the tree(s).

客人们都在房子前面站着。

kèrenmen dōu zài fángzi qiánmian zhàn zhe

The guests are all standing in front of the house.

We can see that the post-verbal complemental use of the location expression focuses on the location, while the pre-verbal adverbial use of the location expression focuses on the action itself. The only case where the alternative structures do not make any difference in meaning is the use of verbs like 住 **zhù** ‘to live’. However, there will be a difference in their function: the former is a descriptive (with a 在 **zài** location phrase), while the latter is an expository (with an unmarked verb):

他们住在伦敦。 **tāmen zhù zài lúndūn**

他们在伦敦住。⁷ **tāmen zài lúndūn zhù**

They live in London.

⁷ Note that in this case 住 **zhù** ‘to live; to stay’ is used monosyllabically without the addition of 着 **zhe**, or it would be a descriptive sentence again.

8.4 Location expressions as sentence beginners

Location expressions in a sentence naturally indicate places that the speaker/writer is sure about, and, like point of time expressions, they are of definite reference. As we have seen, expressions of definite reference come before the verb, and location expressions are naturally found as coverbal phrases placed pre-verbally (e.g. the 在 **zài** phrases seen above) or as sentence beginners.⁸

⁸ 在 **zài** does not usually occur with sentence beginners. For example, 他在图书馆看书。 **tā zài túshūguǎn kàn shū** ‘He is reading in the library’ vs 图书馆有很多中文书。 **túshūguǎn yǒu hěn duō zhōngwén shū** ‘There are a lot of Chinese books in the library’. If 在 **zài** is present with a sentence beginner, it emphasizes the location: e.g. 在车站外边有一个大铜像。 **zài chēzhàn wàibian yǒu yī ge dà tóngxiàng** ‘Outside the station is a large bronze statue’, while the version without 在 **zài** only indicates the location: 车站外边有一个大铜像。 **chēzhàn wàibian yǒu yī ge dà tóngxiàng** ‘There is a large bronze statue outside the station.’

An expository sentence that states that ‘there is something somewhere’ is therefore often couched in Chinese as ‘somewhere has that something’. For example, ‘there is a book on the table’ will have to become literally ‘the top of the table has a book’, 桌子上面有一本书 *zhuōzi shàngmian yǒu yī běn shū*. Similarly:

箱子里有不少新衬衫。

xiāngzi lǐ yǒu bùshǎo xīn chènshān

There are quite a few new shirts in the case/box.

冰箱里还有橘子水。

bīngxiāng lǐ hái yǒu júzishuǐ

There is also orange juice in the fridge.

书架上只有一本书。

shūjià shàng zhǐyǒu yī běn shū

There is only one book on the bookcase.

行李架上没有行李。

xínglijia shàng méiyǒu xíngli

There is no luggage on the luggage rack.

房子后面有一个小菜园。

fángzi hòumian yǒu yī ge xiǎo càiyuán

There is a small vegetable garden behind the house.

The verb 有 *yǒu* ‘to have’ may be replaced by an action verb marked by 着 *zhe* or 了 *le* so that what is indicated is not just that somewhere something exists but also in what fashion or manner something came to exist:

墙上挂着/了一幅画儿。

qiáng shàng guà zhe/le yī fú huàr

There is/was a picture hanging on the wall.

餐桌上放着/了十分精致的餐具。

cānzhuō shàng fàng zhe/le shífēn jīngzhì de cānjù

On the table is/was laid out an extremely fine dinner service.

花瓶里插着/了鲜花。

huāpíng lǐ chā zhe/le xiānhuā

There are/were flowers (arranged/placed) in the vase.

The difference between 着 *zhe* and 了 *le* is that the former is more descriptive and the latter more narrative.

To indicate that something is the sole or dominant occupant of a particular place, 是 *shì* ‘to be’ is often used instead of 有 *yǒu* ‘to have’:

花园里到处都是野草。

huāyuán li dào chù dōu shì yěcǎo

Everywhere in the garden are weeds.

屋子里都是烟。

wūzi li dōu shì yān

The room is full of smoke.

大学入口处旁边是一个大钟楼。

dàxué rùkǒuchù pángbian shì yī ge dà zhōnglóu

Beside the entrance to the university is a large clock tower.

Similarly, an action verb can be used in this sense provided it is followed immediately by the monosyllabic complement 满 *mǎn* ‘full of’ and is marked by 了 *le*:

花园里到处长满了野草。

huāyuán li dào chù zhǎng mǎn le yěcǎo

Everywhere in the garden has grown full of weeds.

屋子里充满了烟雾。

wūzi li chōngmǎn le yānwù

The room is full of smoke.

汽车里挤满了人。

qìchē li jǐ mǎn le rén

The bus/car was crammed with people.

抽屉里塞满了旧报纸。

chōuti li sāi mǎn le jiù bàozhǐ

The drawer is/was stuffed (full) with old newspapers.

桌子上堆满了书。

zhuōzi shàng duī mǎn le shū

The table is/was piled high with books.

If the action verb indicates movement, the notion of existence gives way to that of **emergence** or **disappearance**. When this happens, complements indicating direction or result⁹ have to be incorporated before the marker 了 *le* is added.

⁹ See §§8.5.1 and 8.5.2 for direction complements; see Chapter 10 for result complements.

海面上飞来了一群海鸥。

hǎimian shàng fēi lái le yī qún hǎi'ōu

A flock of gulls came flying over the sea.

地平线上升起了一道黑烟。

dìpíngxiàn shàng shēng qǐ le yī dào hēiyān

A thread of black smoke rose on the horizon.

后面传来了一阵阵的警笛声。

hòumian chuán lái le yī zhènzhen de jǐngdí shēng

From behind came the sound of police whistles one after another.

监狱里跑掉了两个犯人。

jiānyù lǐ pǎo diào le liǎng ge fàn rén

Two prisoners/convicts escaped from the prison.

8.5 Direction indicators

Direction indicator is a term used broadly to refer to a small set of verbs which can be used as movement verbs on their own, or can be attached to other action verbs to indicate direction of movement or the beginning of a process involving the action. The set can be divided into two subsets, forming two tiers of possible attachment to an action verb.

8.5.1 Simple direction indicators 来 lái 'to come' and 去 qù 'to go'

来 lái 'to come' and 去 qù 'to go' are the two simple direction indicators on which other disyllabic direction indicators are built. 来 lái 'to come' indicates direction towards the speaker and 去 qù 'to go' away from the speaker:¹⁰

爷爷回来了¹¹。 **yéye huí lái le**

(lit. Grandpa return come **le**) Grandpa has come/come back.

爷爷回去了 **yéye huí qù le**

(lit. Grandpa return go **le**) Grandpa has gone/went back.

¹⁰ 来 lái/lái 'to come' and 去 qù/qu 'to go' on their own and in other particular combinations may also respectively indicate related notions such as 'coming into, or disappearing from, view', 'regaining or losing consciousness'. These uses will be discussed below.

¹¹ Full discussion of the end-of-sentence particle 了 **le** can be found in [Chapter 21](#).

If there is a location object, it is placed between the verb and its direction indicator:

爷爷回家来了。**yéye huí jiā lái le**
(lit. Grandpa return home come **le**) Grandpa has come home.

爷爷出国去了。**yéye chūguó qù le**
(lit. Grandpa exit country go **le**) Grandpa has gone abroad.

If there is a physical object, it comes after the verb, either before or after the direction indicator:

爷爷带了一瓶酒来。**yéye dài le yī píng jiǔ lái**
Grandpa brought a bottle of wine.

爷爷带来了一瓶酒。**yéye dài lái le yī píng jiǔ**
Grandpa brought a bottle of wine.

8.5.2 *Disyllabic direction indicators*

来 **lái** ‘to come’ and 去 **qù** ‘to go’ are combined with a set of movement verbs¹² to form disyllabic direction indicators, which are attached to a verb to indicate more precise directions:

		来 lái towards	去 qu away from
上 shàng	up	上来 shànglái	上去 shàngqu
下 xià	down	下来 xiàlái	下去 xiàqu
进 jìn	in(to)	进来 jìnlái	进去 jìnqu
出 chū	out (of)	出来 chūlái	出去 chūqu
过 guò	across/over	过来 guòlái	过去 guòqu
回 huí	back	回来 huílái	回去 huíqu
开 kāi	away	开来 kāilái	开去 kāiqu
起 qǐ	upward	起来 qǐlái	*起去 *qǐqu ¹³

¹² These direction indicators also constitute motion verbs themselves, e.g. 回来 **huílái** ‘come back’, 下去 **xiàqu** ‘go down’, 进来 **jìnlái** ‘come in’, 过去 **guòqu** ‘go over’, etc. (see examples under §8.5.1).

¹³ The combination of 起去 **qǐqu** is no longer used.

For example:

登山运动员爬上来了。
dēngshān yùndòngyuán pá shànglái le
The mountaineers have climbed up. (towards the speaker–observer above)

登山运动员爬上去了。

dēngshān yùndòngyuán pá shàngqu le

The mountaineers have climbed up. (away from the speaker–observer below)

If the sentence is narrative rather than expository (see [Chapter 20](#)), the completed action aspect marker 了 *le* comes after the verb and before the direction indicator:

登山运动员爬了上来。

dēngshān yùndòngyuán pá le shànglai

The mountaineers climbed up. (towards the speaker–observer)

登山运动员爬了上去。

dēngshān yùndòngyuán pá le shàngqu

The mountaineers climbed up. (away from the speaker–observer)

If a location object is present, it is placed between the two syllables of the disyllabic direction indicator:

登山运动员爬上山来了。

dēngshān yùndòngyuán pá shàng shān lai le

The mountaineers have climbed up the mountain. (towards the speaker–observer)

登山运动员爬上山去了。

dēngshān yùndòngyuán pá shàng shān qu le

The mountaineers have climbed up the mountain. (away from the speaker–observer)

Completed action in such location–object sentences is expressed either by the verb and direction indicator themselves or by placing 了 *le* after the first element in the indicator and omitting the second element, i.e. 来 *lai* or 去 *qu*:

松鼠爬上树去。 **sōngshǔ pá shàng shù qu**

松鼠爬上了树。 **sōngshǔ pá shàng le shù**

The squirrel climbed up the tree.

哥哥跑下楼来。 **gēge pǎo xià lóu lai**

哥哥跑下了楼。 **gēge pǎo xià le lóu**

Elder brother ran downstairs.

火车开过桥去。 **huǒchē kāi guò qiáo qu**

火车开过了桥。 **huǒchē kāi guò le qiáo**

The train went over a bridge.

Here are some more location–object examples where 来 *lái* or 去 *qù* has to be omitted due to the presence of 了 *le*:

大家都走进了屋子。

dàjiā dōu zǒu jìn le wūzi

Everyone came into the room.

他游到了对岸。

tā yóu dào le duì'àn

He swam to the opposite bank.

演员登上了舞台。

yǎnyuán dēng shàng le wǔtái

The actor went on stage.

If an object other than location (i.e. physical or abstract) is present, it can be placed either (a) between the verb and the direction indicator, or (b) after the verb and the direction indicator or (c) between the two parts of the direction indicator with 了 *le* omitted:

(a) 服务员提了一只箱子进来。 **fúwùyuán tí le yī zhī xiāngzi jìnlai**

(b) 服务员提进来了一只箱子。 **fúwùyuán tí jìnlai le yī zhī xiāngzi**

(c) 服务员提进一只箱子来。 **fúwùyuán tí jìn yī zhī xiāngzi lai**

The attendant brought a trunk in.

(a) 妈妈买了一只大火鸡回来。 **māma mǎi le yī zhī dà huǒjī huílai**

(b) 妈妈买回来了一只大火鸡。 **māma mǎi huílai le yī zhī dà huǒjī**

(c) 妈妈买回一只大火鸡来。 **māma mǎi huí yī zhī dà huǒjī lai**

Mum bought (and brought home) a big turkey.

(a) 工程师想了一个好办法出来。¹⁴

gōngchéngshī xiǎng le yī ge hǎo bànfǎ chūlai

(b) 工程师想出来了一个好办法。

gōngchéngshī xiǎng chūlai le yī ge hǎo bànfǎ

(c) 工程师想出一个好办法来。

gōngchéngshī xiǎng chū yī ge hǎo bànfǎ lai

The engineer came up with a good idea.

¹⁴ With an abstract noun object, this construction is probably less commonly used.

In relation to sentence (c), it would be less acceptable to keep 了 *le* in:

*服务员提进了一只箱子来。

fúwùyuán tí jìn le yī zhī xiāngzi lai

*The attendant brought a trunk in.

*妈妈买回了一只大火鸡来。

māma mǎi huí le yī zhī dà huǒjī lai

*Mum bought (and took home) a big turkey.

8.5.3 Direction indicators indicating meaning other than direction

Disyllabic direction indicators can also be used figuratively to convey meanings beyond those of directional motion, though a link with the basic idea of movement is retained. In sentences with these figurative meanings, the object has always to be placed between the two syllables of the disyllabic direction indicator, and the completion aspect marker 了 *le* may not be incorporated under any circumstances. However, if the verb is intransitive and there is no object present, 了 *le* can be used after the verb and before the disyllabic direction indicator.

- (a) 出来 *chūlai* can imply ‘coming into view or having its presence felt’ and 下去 *xiàqu*, ‘disappearing from view’:

他从口袋里拿出两镑钱来。

tā cōng kǒudài lì ná chū liǎng bàng qián lai

He took two pounds (cash) out of his pocket.

没人提出任何问题来。

méi rén tíchū rènhé wèntí lai

No one raised any questions.

病人吞下一粒药丸去。

bìng rén tūn xià yī lì yàowán qu

The patient swallowed a pill.

- (b) 过来 *guòlai* and 起来 *qǐlai* can respectively convey ‘regaining consciousness’ and ‘regaining memory’ and 过去 *guòqu*, ‘losing consciousness’:

醉汉最后醒了过来。

zuìhàn zuìhòu xǐng le guòlai

The drunkard finally came to.

他突然想起这件事来。

tā tūrán xiǎng qǐ zhèi jiàn shì lai

He suddenly remembered this.

那个坏消息使她昏了过去。

nèi ge huài xiāoxi shǐ tā hūn le guòqu

That bad news made her faint.

- (c) 起来 **qǐlai** and 下去 **xiàqu** can respectively imply ‘starting’ and ‘continuing’ an action or process:

人人都唱起歌来。

rénrén dōu chàng qǐ gē lai

Everyone began to sing.

天下起雨来。

tiān xià qǐ yǔ lai

It began to rain.

老头儿正想说下去。

lǎotóu zhèng xiǎng shuō xiàqu

The old man was about to continue to speak.

我们只能等下去。

wǒmen zhǐ néng děng xiàqu

All we could do was carry on waiting.

我们不能再待下去了。

wǒmen bù néng zài dāi xiàqu le

We cannot stay here any longer.

Ambiguity as to whether the direction indicators refer to direction or process does not generally arise because of the semantic nature of the action verbs in the collocation. However, in some cases, such ambiguities do exist. The verb 跳 **tiào** ‘to jump’, for instance, is naturally compatible with upward motion and when combined with 起来 **qǐlai**, it may mean either ‘to jump up’ or ‘to start jumping’ or in particular contexts ‘to start dancing’. The ambiguity is resolved only by the given context or co-text:

他吓得跳了起来。

tā xià de tiào le qǐlai

He was so startled he jumped to his feet.

随着悠扬的舞曲，大家都跳了起来。

suízhe yōuyáng de wǔqǔ | dàjiā dōu tiào le qǐlai

Everyone began to dance with the rise and fall of the dance music.

- (d) 下来 **xiàlai** indicates ‘settling down or coming to a halt’:

屋子里渐渐地静了下来。

wūzi lǐ jiànjìan de jìng le xiàlai

The room slowly went quiet.

汽车慢慢地停了下来。

qìchē mànman de tíng le xiàlai

The car slowly came to a halt.

8.6 The destination indicator 到 dào 'to arrive'

As an indicator of destination, 到 dào 'to arrive' is hybrid in nature, and may specify either location or direction. We will first look at 到 dào as a location indicator:

他一口气跑到火车站。

tā yīkǒuqì pǎo dào huǒchēzhàn

He ran to the railway station without stopping. (lit. in one breath)

她慢慢地走到河边。

tā mànman de zǒu dào hébiān

She slowly walked to the river bank.

Here, the 到 dào phrases, as sentence terminators (similar to the location expressions with 在 zài in §8.4), clearly indicate the terminal point or destination of the movement verbs.

More often, however, 到 dào combines with 来 lái or 去 qù to indicate direction, and such combinations usually take the form of:

到 dào + location object + 来 lái or 去 qù

These structures are coverbal phrases, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 11, and may feature pre-verbally as adverbials or post-verbally as complements. As adverbials they identify where the subject is before the action in the verb is carried out and as complements they indicate where the subject or object is after the action.

(a) as adverbials:

他到车站去接朋友。¹⁵

tā dào chēzhàn qù jiē péngyou

He went to the station to meet a friend.

妈妈到市场去买菜。

māma dào shìchǎng qù mǎi cài

Mother went to the market to buy vegetables/food.

叔叔到我家来探望我爸爸和妈妈。

shūshu dào wǒ jiā lái tànwàng wǒ bàba hé māma

Uncle came to my/our house to visit mother and father.

¹⁵ In sentences like these, 来 lái or 去 qù may colloquially be placed at the end of the sentence: e.g. 他到车站接朋友去。tā dào chēzhàn jiē péngyou qù 'He went to the station to meet a friend'.

The subjects in these cases must get to their destination before they can carry out the various actions of meeting friends, buying food or visiting parents.

(b) as complements:

他急急忙忙地跑到我家来。

tā jíjí máng máng de pǎo dào wǒ jiā lái

He came running to my house in a great rush.

鸟儿飞到树上去。

niǎo r fēi dào shù shàng qu

The bird flew on to the tree.

潜水员潜到海底去。

qiánshuǐ yuán qián dào hǎi dǐ qu

The divers dived to the bottom of the sea.

他们把楼上的家具搬到楼下去。

tāmen bǎ lóu shàng de jiājù bān dào lóu xià qu

They moved the (upstairs) furniture downstairs.

她把省下来的钱存到银行里去。

tā bǎ shěng xià lái de qián cún dào yínháng lǐ qu

She put/deposited her savings in the bank.

The subjects here must carry out the actions before they or what they are moving reach their various destinations.

Adverbials

Adverbials are words or expressions that modify verbs in the same way that attributives qualify nouns, and they are therefore placed immediately before the verb they modify. They may be divided into two categories: restrictive and descriptive.

Restrictive adverbials function to restrict the time frame, location, tone, structural orientation or referential scope of verbs. They consist of (a) time expressions; (b) a closed set of monosyllabic adverbs that refer forwards and backwards to particular words or expressions in a sentence or context to highlight or emphasise them; (c) set expressions used as mood or tone-setters of an utterance (e.g. 老实说 *lǎoshí shuō* ‘to be honest’); (d) negators; and (e) coverbal expressions of all kinds.¹ Descriptive adverbials, on the other hand, describe the manner in which the action encoded in the verb is being carried out. They are usually, but not always, followed by the marker 地 *de* ‘in the manner of’.

Restrictive adverbials, apart from coverbal expressions, generally come before descriptive ones. If there is a coverbal expression in the sentence, a descriptive adverbial can be placed either before or after it depending on meaning and emphasis. In contrast with this, a coverbal expression always occurs after restrictive adverbials.²

¹ See Chapter 11 on coverbs.

² Details of the relative position of adverbials are given in §9.5.

9.1 Restrictive adverbials

9.1.1 Time expressions

As we saw in [Chapter 7](#), point-of-time expressions always come before the verb, so that in the time-sequenced logic of a Chinese sentence, the time reference can be made clear before the action of the verb is specified:

我每天早晨七点钟上学。

wǒ měitiān zǎochén qī diǎn zhōng shàngxué

I go to school every morning at 7 o'clock.

你们几时走? **nǐmen jǐ shí zǒu**

When are you leaving?

他两家过去常常来往。 **tā liǎng jiā guòqù chángcháng lái wǎng**

Their two families in the past often visited each other.

我一时想不起他是谁。 **wǒ yīshí xiǎngbuqǐ tā shì shuí**

I can't remember for the moment/off hand who he is.

他的理想终于实现了。 **tāde lǐxiǎng zhōngyú shíxiàn le**

His ideal in the end was realised.

咱们改天再谈吧。 **zánmen gǎitiān zài tán ba**

Let's talk again another day.

我这就来³。 **wǒ zhè jiù lái**

I'll come straight away.

他在一年之内两次打破(了)世界纪录。⁴

tā zài yī nián zhīnèi liǎng cì dǎpò (le) shìjiè jìlù

He broke the world record twice in a year.

我们好久没有通信了。 **wǒmen hǎojiǔ méiyǒu tōngxìn le**

We have not corresponded for a long time.

他向来不吸烟。 **tā xiànglái bù xīyān**

He has never (lit. hitherto not) smoked.

她不时向窗外探望。 **tā bùshí xiàng chuāngwài tàn wàng**

She from time to time looked out of the window.

³ 这 zhè here means 马上 mǎshàng 'immediately'.

⁴ This sentence and a few of the following ones are examples of duration and frequency expressions coming before the verb. For an explanation of this, see §7.1.

我昨天就把这篇文章写完了。

wǒ zuótiān jiù bǎ zhèi piān wénzhāng xiě wán le

I finished writing this essay yesterday.

那个日本妇女忽地⁵向他鞠了一躬。

nèi ge rìběn fùnǚ hūdi xiàng tā jūle yī gōng

That Japanese woman suddenly bowed to him.

⁵ A number of adverbs like 忽地 hūdi, e.g. 突地 tūdi ‘abruptly’, 陡地 dǒudi ‘unexpectedly’, 蓦地 mòdi ‘suddenly’, although they appear to be descriptive adverbials with 地 dì (see §9.2), in fact function as restrictive adverbials.

From these examples, we can see that time adverbials generally come immediately after the subject and before the verb (or the coverbal phrase if there is one). Sentences like the following are not acceptable:

*她向窗外不时探望。

*tā xiàng chuāngwài bùshí tànwàng

*我把这篇文章昨天就写完了。

*wǒ bǎ zhèi piān wénzhāng zuótiān jiù xiě wán le

Time expressions, however, may be placed at the beginning of the sentence before the subject if they are to be emphasised and if their scope of modification covers the whole sentence rather than the verb alone. For example:

每天早晨七点钟，弟弟还睡得很香的时候，我就背着书包上学去了。

měitiān zǎochén qī diǎn zhōng | dìdì hái shuìde hěn xiāng de

shíhou | wǒ jiù bēizhe shūbāo shàngxué qu le

Every morning at 7 o'clock, while younger brother is still fast asleep,

I go off to school with my satchel on my back.

几时你才能变得不那么调皮呢？

jǐshí nǐ cái néng biàn de bù nàme tiáopí ne

When are you ever going to stop being so mischievous?

Sometimes time expressions may take the form of short verbal expressions, which have the inbuilt meaning of ‘while’, ‘after’, ‘before’, etc. It is as if time words like 的时候 de shíhou, 时 shí ‘while’ or 之前 zhīqián, 以前 yǐqián ‘before’ or 之后 zhīhòu, and 以后 yǐhòu ‘after’, which would normally be found after the verbal expression, have been omitted.⁶

她干活儿十分马虎。tā gàn huór shífēn mǎhu

(lit. she do work extremely careless)

She is extremely careless with her work.

⁶ See Chapter 11 on time clauses.

这种电池充了电可以再用。

zhèi zhǒng diànrú chōng le diàn kěyǐ zài yòng

(lit. this mw:kind battery fill/charge **le** electricity may again use)

This battery when it's charged can be used again.

这位老师说起话来喜欢比划手势。

zhèi wèi lǎoshī shuō qǐ huà lái xǐhuan bǐhuà shǒushì

(lit. this mw teacher begin to speak always like gesticulate gestures)

This teacher likes to gesticulate when he speaks.

你临走告诉我一声。**nǐ línzǒu gàosu wǒ yī shēng**

(lit. you near-go tell me one mw:sound) Tell me when you are leaving.

9.1.2 Monosyllabic referential adverbs

Referential adverbs are a set of monosyllabic adverbs that are placed immediately before verbs to refer backwards or forwards to a time, person or entity mentioned earlier or later in the sentence. They indicate immediacy, tardiness, inclusion, contrast, repetition, unexpectedness, etc. on the part of the referent in relation to the action that is about to take place or has just taken place.

The main referential adverbs⁷ are:

就	jiù	immediately afterwards
才	cái	not until
都	dōu	all; both
也	yě	also
却	què	on the other hand; nevertheless
还	hái	in addition; still
倒	dào	on the contrary; but, however
再	zài	again (in future)
又	yòu	(once) again
只	zhǐ	only
竟	jìng	unexpectedly

⁷ See Chapter 22 for these adverbials discussed as conjunctives.

Here are some examples:

一到冬天，天很快就黑了。

yī dào dōngtiān | tiān hěn kuài jiù hēi le

(lit. once arrive winter, sky very quickly then black **le**)

As soon as winter comes, it quickly gets dark.

我家就⁸在大学附近，几分钟就走到了。

wǒ jiā jiù zài dàxué fùjìn | jǐ fēnzhōng jiù zǒu dào le
(lit. my home just cv:at university vicinity, few minutes then
walk-arrive **le**)

My home is near the university, and I can walk there in a few minutes.

他们大学毕业之后才结婚。**tāmen dàxué bìyè zhīhòu cái jiéhūn**
(lit. they university graduate after only then marry)

They did not get married until they graduated from university.

与会的人都赞成他的提议。

yùhuì de rén dōu zànchéng tā de tíyì

(lit. attend conference of people all approve his proposal)

The people at the conference/meeting all approved/endorsed his proposal.

这条路早晚都塞车。**zhèi tiáo lù zǎowǎn dōu sāi che**

(lit. this mw road morning-evening both block cars)

Morning and evening there is always a traffic jam on this road.

离合器坏了，刹车也坏了。**líhéqì huài le | shāchē yě huài le**

(lit. clutch wrong **le**, brake also wrong **le**)

The clutch broke down, and so did the brake.

这条数学题老师也无法解答。

zhèi tiáo shùxué tí lǎoshī yě wúfǎ jiědá

(lit. this mw maths problem teacher also no way explain)

Even the teacher has no way to answer this maths problem.

那瞬间我却说不出话来。

nèi shùnjiān wǒ què shuōbuchū huà lái

(lit. that instant I but speak not out words come)

At that instant I could not say a word (however much I wanted to).

我妈妈还买了不少头巾。**wǒ māma hái mǎi le bùshǎo tóujīn**

(lit. my mother in addition buy **le** not a few scarves)

My mother in addition/also bought several scarves.

你还不明白我的意思吗？**nǐ hái bù míngbai wǒde yìsi ma**

(lit. you still not understand my meaning **ma**)

Do you still not understand my meaning?

⁸ The referential adverb 就 jiù 'just' here refers forward to indicate 'my home is near the university' rather than backwards.

最后，他倒没有受到处罚。

zuihòu | tā dào méiyǒu shòudào chǔfá

(lit. in the end, he but not have receive punishment)

In the end he did not receive any punishment (as he should).

这件事以后再说吧。**zhèi jiàn shì yǐhòu zài shuō ba**

(lit. this mw matter afterwards again speak **ba**)

Let's talk about this again later.

一不小心，他又把球踢出了界外。

yī bù xiǎoxīn | tā yòu bǎ qiú tīchū le jièwài

(lit. once not careful, he again cv:grasping ball kick out **le**
boundary-outside)

In a moment of carelessness, he kicked the ball out again.

这儿只有你一个人吗？**zhèr zhǐ yǒu nǐ yī ge rén ma**

(lit. here only have/there is you one mw person **ma**)

Are you the only person here?

想不到事情竟发展到不可收拾的地步。

xiǎngbudào shìqíng jìng fāzhǎn dào bùkě shōushi de dibù

(lit. did not expect matter unexpectedly develop cv:to not able repair
de stage)

Unexpectedly, the matter developed to an irretrievable stage/point.

9.2 Descriptive adverbials

Descriptive adverbials are formed from adjectives or various kinds of adjectival constructions, which must be at least two syllables long. They not only describe the way in which the action in the verb is being carried out but they also demonstrate an attitude or conscious effort on the part of the subject, that is, the initiator of the action (unless of course the subject is inanimate and cannot wilfully exert any influence). Descriptive adverbials invite appreciation by the senses (sight, hearing, touch, etc.) or understanding of human motives, qualities, etc. They are generally marked by the adverbial marker 地 **de** 'in the manner of', and are placed immediately before a verb or before or after a coverbal phrase:

他热情地接待了来宾。**tā rèqíng de jiēdài le láibīn**

(lit. he warm de receive **le** guests) He received the guests warmly.

她敏捷地跑上前来。**tā mǐnjié de pǎo shàng qián lai**

(lit. she nimble de run up front come) She came running forward quickly.

老板很痛快地答应了我们的要求。

lǎobǎn hěn tòngkuài de dáyīng le wǒmen de yāoqiú

(lit. the boss very quick **de** agree **le** our request(s))

The proprietor/boss agreed to our request promptly.

姐姐高高兴兴地跑回家来。

jiějie gāogāoxìngxìng de pǎo huí jiā lai

(lit. elder sister high-high-spirit-spirit **de** run back home come)

Elder sister came running home happily.

爸爸笼统地解释了一下。

bàba lǒnglǒngtǒngtǒng de jiěshì le yīxià

(lit. father sweeping-sweeping **de** explain **le** one mw:time)

Father gave a sweeping explanation.

More rarely, verbs or noun phrases with or without 地 *de*⁹ can also function as descriptive adverbials:

他合不拢嘴地笑着。

tā hé bu lǒng zuǐ de xiào zhe

(lit. he close-not-be-able mouth **de** grin **zhe**)

He was grinning from ear to ear.

观众象潮水一样(地)涌进剧场。

guānzhòng xiàng cháoshuǐ yīyàng (de) yǒngjìn jùchǎng

(lit. audience like tide-water same **de** flood cv:into theatre)

The audience flooded into the theatre (like a tide).

她一个劲儿地诉说着。

tā yī ge jìngr de sùshuō zhe

(lit. she persistent **de** complain **zhe**)

She went on complaining without stop.

他自己一个人把房间收拾干净。

tā zìjǐ yī ge rén bǎ fángjiān shōushi gānjìng

(lit. he self one mw person cv:grasping room tidy up clean)

He cleaned up the room on his own.

⁹ For descriptive adverbials without 地 *de*, see §9.4 below.

Monosyllables (including onomatopoeic terms) have to be reduplicated to become adverbials. For example:

慢慢地	mànmān de	slowly
好好地	hǎohǎo de	well
匆匆地	cōngcōng de	hurriedly
悄悄地	qiāoqiāo de	quietly
轻轻地	qīngqīng de	gently
呼呼地	hūhū de	whistling (of wind); noise (of snoring)

Trisyllabic (particularly phonaesthetic) adjectives, quadrisyllabic (often idiomatic) expressions and reduplicated disyllabic onomatopoeic terms are also used as adverbials:

静悄悄地	jìngqiāoqiāo de	very quietly
亮晶晶地	liàngjīngjīng de	glitteringly
一个个地	yīgègè de	one by one
齐心协力地	qíxīn xiélì de	with concerted effort
力不从心地	lì bù cóng xīn de	helplessly
翻来覆去地	fānláifùqù de	repeatedly
咕嘟咕嘟地	gūdūgūdū de	gurgling, bubbling
劈劈啪啪地	pīpīpāpā de	with a cracking/clapping sound

The quadrisyllabic phrases can also be reduplications or intercalated expressions:

清清楚楚地	qīngqīngchǔchǔ de	clearly
认认真真地	rènrènzhēnzhēn de	earnestly
得意洋洋地	déyì yángyáng de	triumphantly, pleased with oneself
一起一伏地	yī qǐ yī fú de	rising and falling, up and down
又渴又累地	yòu kě yòu lèi de	both thirsty and tired
不高不低地	bù gāo bù dī de	neither high nor low

Adverbials longer than this are not common, but they are possible particularly if they incorporate words like 似的 *shì de* 'as if':

好象一点也不在乎似的	hǎoxiàng yīdiǎn yě bù zàihu shì de
as if not caring a bit/jot	
被人骂了一顿似的	bèi rén mà le yī dùn shì de
as if rebuked (by someone)	

9.3 Initiator-oriented or action-oriented descriptive adverbials

We have mentioned that a descriptive adverbial may come before or after a coverbal expression. This choice is not random, but is in most cases dictated by the underlying meaning. If the adverbial is **initiator-oriented**

and relates more to the attitude or appearance of the subject of the sentence, it is usually placed before the coverbal expression¹⁰ nearer to the initiator subject; if it relates more to the manner of the action it may be said to be more **action-oriented**, and is therefore generally placed after the coverbal expression and immediately before the verb.¹¹ Compare the following pair of sentences:

- (a) 他漫不经心地把要带的东西塞进背包里。(initiator-oriented)

tā màn bù jīngxīn de bǎ yào dài de dōngxi sāijìn bèibāo li

(lit. he casually cv:grasping want take **de** things stuff cv:into

rucksack-inside)

All casual, he stuffed the things he wanted to take into the rucksack.

and:

他把要带的东西漫不经心地塞进背包里。(action-oriented)

tā bǎ yào dài de dōngxi màn bù jīngxīn de sāijìn bèibāo li

(lit. he cv:grasping want take **de** things casually stuff cv:into rucksack)

He stuffed the things he wanted to take casually into the rucksack.

- (b) 他满脸笑容地把要带的东西塞进背包里。(initiator-oriented)

tā mǎnliǎn xiàoróng de bǎ yào dài de dōngxi sāijìn bèibāo li

(lit. he grinning all over cv:grasping want take **de** things stuff cv:into

rucksack-inside)

Grinning all over, he stuffed the things he wanted to take into the rucksack.

but less acceptable as:

*他把要带的东西满脸笑容地塞进背包里。(non-action-oriented)

***tā bǎ yào dài de dōngxi mǎnliǎn xiàoróng de sāijìn bèibāo li**

*(lit. he cv:grasping want take **de** things grinning all over stuff cv:into rucksack-inside)

- (c) 他把要带的东西乱七八糟地塞进背包里。(action-oriented)

tā bǎ yào dài de dōngxi luànqībāzāo de sāijìn bèibāo li

(lit. he cv:grasping want take **de** things messily stuff cv:into

rucksack-inside)

He stuffed the things he wanted to take messily into his rucksack.

¹⁰ Descriptive adverbials indicating intention or attitude may, however, often be used to indicate manner at the same time.

¹¹ The flexible word order of English sometimes makes these distinctions less marked.

but less acceptable as:

*他乱七八糟地把要带的东西塞进背包里。(non-initiator-oriented)

***tā luànqībāzāo de bǎ yào dài de dōngxi sāijìn bèibāo li**

*(lit. he messily cv:grasping want take **de** things stuff cv:into
rucksack-inside)

The first of the above pairs illustrates that these adverbials may be used before or after the coverbal expression, depending on whether they are describing attitude/appearance or manner. However, descriptive adverbials that indicate only attitude or appearance are less likely to be placed after the coverbal phrase (second pair) and those of manner likewise are less likely to come before the coverbal phrase (third pair).

Here are some more examples of either initiator-oriented or action-oriented adverbials:

他勇敢地把球顶出界外。(initiator-oriented)

tā yǒnggǎn de bǎ qiú dǐngchū jiè wài

(lit. he bravely cv:grasping ball head out boundary-outside)

He bravely headed the ball out of play.

but less acceptable as:

*他把球勇敢地顶出界外。

***tā bǎ qiú yǒnggǎn de dǐngchū jiè wài**

*(lit. he cv:grasping ball bravely head out boundary-outside)

他迅速地把车刹住。(initiator-oriented)

tā xùnsù de bǎ chē shāzhù

(lit. he rapidly cv:grasping car brake-stop)

Rapidly he put on the brake (and brought the car to a halt).

他把车迅速地刹住。(action-oriented)

tā bǎ chē xùnsù de shāzhù

(lit. he cv:grasping car rapidly brake-stop)

He braked rapidly (and brought the car to a halt).

他诚诚恳恳地向她道歉。(initiator-oriented)

tā chéngchéngkěnkě de xiàng tā dàoqiàn

(lit. he sincerely cv:to her apologise) He apologised to her sincerely.

but less likely as:

*他向她诚诚恳恳地道歉。

***tā xiàng tā chéngchéngkěnkě de dàoqiàn**

(lit. he cv:to her sincerely apologise)

We have seen that the marker 地 *de* ‘in the manner of’ is usually present with descriptive adverbials. However, it is not used when the adverbial includes the numeral 一 *yī* in expressions indicating ‘togetherness’, ‘swiftness’, ‘abruptness’.¹²

他们一起去做义务工作。 **tāmen yīqǐ qù zuò yìwù gōngzuò**

(lit. they together go do voluntary work)

They are going together to do voluntary work.

孩子们一齐拥了上来。 **háizimen yīqí yōng le shànglai**

(lit. the children in unison swarm **le** up come)

The children swarmed over all together.

他一拳打在那个人的脸上。

tā yī quán dǎ zài nèi ge rén de liǎn shàng

(lit. he one fist hit cv:on that mw person’s face-on)

He punched that man in the face.

他一头扎进水里。 **tā yī tóu zhājìn shuǐ li**

(lit. he one head plunge cv:into water-inside)

He plunged headlong into the water.

他一骨碌从床上爬起来。

tā yī gūlu cóng chuáng shàng pá qǐlai

(lit. he rolling cv:from bed-top crawl up come) He leapt out of bed.

他一个纵步跳过了小河。 **tā yī ge zòngbù tiào guò le xiǎo hé**

(lit. he one mw bound jump over **le** little river)

With one bound, he leapt across the stream.

汽车嘎的一声刹住了。 **qìchē gā de yī shēng shāzhù le**

(lit. the car with a screech brake-stop **le**) The car screeched to a halt.

¹² Note, however, that if 一 *yī* in the expression indicates ‘repetition or continuation’, 地 *de* is retained: e.g. 一次又一次地 *yī cì yòu yī cì de* ‘again and again’, 一个劲儿地 *yī ge jìn de* ‘non-stop’.

Monosyllabic adjectives can be used as adverbials in imperatives, brief responses, etc. and these adverbials are not followed by 地 *de*:

快来! **kuàilái**

(lit. fast come) Come quickly!

慢走! **mànzǒu**

(lit. slow leave) Take care, take it easy.

好说好说。 **hǎoshuō hǎoshuō**

(lit. well said well said) It's very kind of you to say so.

A number of adverbs in the lexicon, though descriptive in nature, are not normally found with 地 *de*. This is simply a matter of usage and no generalisations can be made about them. For example:

大家连忙迎了上去。

dàjiā liánmáng yíng le shàngqu

(lit. everyone promptly welcome *le* up go)

Everyone hastened forward (to meet him/her/them).

两国会谈圆满结束。

liǎng guó huìtán yuánmǎn jiéshù

(lit. two country talks satisfactorily conclude)

The talks between the two countries were satisfactorily concluded.

他从不轻易发表意见。

tā cóng bù qīngyì fābiǎo yìjiàn

(lit. he hitherto not rashly express opinion)

He never made rash comments.

列车徐徐开动。 **lièchē xúxú kāidòng**

(lit. the train slowly start-move) The train slowly started to move.

一缕炊烟袅袅上升。

yī lǚ chuīyān niǎoniǎo shàngshēng

(lit. one mw:thread kitchen smoke curling up rise)

A wisp of smoke curled up from the kitchen chimney.

我拉拉杂杂谈了这些，请大家指教。

wǒ lālāzázá tán le zhèxiē | qǐng dàjiā zhǐjiào

(lit. I in disorganised way talk *le* these, please everyone make comments)

I have chatted in no particular order about these things and so would everyone please make comments.

9.5 Relative position of adverbials

When there is more than one adverbial in a sentence the normal order is for restrictive adverbials to come before descriptive ones. Within the descriptive category, initiator-oriented adverbials precede action-oriented adverbials. The overall sequence is something like:

- (a) adverbials indicating mood or tone: 很不幸 **hěn bùxìng** ‘unfortunately’ (interchangeable in position with time expressions)
- (b) time expressions: from more general to more specific: 星期天早上十点钟 **xīngqī tiān zǎoshang shí diǎn zhōng**
- (c) monosyllabic referential adverbs: 也 **yě** ‘also’, 都 **dōu** ‘all’
- (d) negators: 不 **bù** ‘not’, 没有 **méiyǒu** ‘did/has not’
- (e) actor-oriented descriptive adverbials: 高高兴兴地 **gāogāoxìngxìng de** ‘happily’
- (f) 着 **zhe** phrases indicating accompanying manner
- (g) action-oriented descriptive adverbials: 一步一步地 **yī bù yī bù de** ‘step by step’
- (h) 把 **bǎ** or 被 **bèi**
- (i) coverbal expressions other than 把 **bǎ** or 被 **bèi** or location expressions: 跟他 **gēn tā** ‘with him’ (interchangeable in position with 把 **bǎ** or 被 **bèi** or location expressions)
- (j) location expressions: 在花园 **zài huāyuán** ‘in the garden’
- (k) onomatopoeic terms: 哗哗哗地 **huāhuāhuā de** (interchangeable in position with location expressions)

An extended sentence illustrating all the above (presented here vertically) could be constructed along the following lines:

老实说 (tone),	lǎoshi shuō frankly
这个孩子 (subject)	zhèi ge hái zi this mw child
每天 (time)	měitiān every day
都 (referential)	dōu all
不 (negator)	bù not
肯 (modal verb)	kěn willing
认认真真地 (actor-oriented)	rènrènzhēnzhēn de seriously
看着课文 (着 zhe phrase)	kàn zhe kèwén reading text
干脆利索地 (action-oriented)	gāncuì lìsuō de briskly/unhesitatingly

把生词 (把 **bǎ** phrase)

bǎ shēngcí

cv:grasping vocabulary

用铅笔 (coverbal phrase)

yòng qiānbǐ

use pencil

在练习本上 (location)

zài liànxíběn shàng

cv:on exercise book-on

唰唰唰地 (onomatopoeic term)

shuāshuāshuā de

with a scratching noise

抄 (**main verb**)

chāo

copy

几遍。 (complement: frequency)

jǐ biàn

a few mw:times

English translation:

Frankly, this child is never willing any day to scratch out without fuss
and with a careful eye on the text (of the lesson) a number of
copies of the new vocabulary into his/her exercise book.

Complements

One of the most distinctive features of Chinese syntax is that a verb in a narrative sentence is rarely used without an object or a complement following it; that is to say, an unmarked verb would not normally be found at the end of a narrative sentence. Even so-called intransitive verbs in Chinese, as we saw in [Chapter 6](#), are in most cases self-contained verb-object structures.

Complements are expressions that indicate in some way the result of the action of the verb or describe the way the action is or has been carried out. In the Chinese mind, they articulate a consequence that is observable in terms of outcome or manner and as such must logically follow the verb. We have already seen examples of complements in duration and frequency phrases ([Chapter 7](#)) and direction expressions ([Chapter 8](#)). Here, we will deal with resultative and potential complements and those indicating manner and consequential state.

10.1 Resultative complements

A **resultative complement** consists of either a result verb¹ or an adjective and it is placed immediately after the main verb. If there is a following noun, it comes after the verb + complement. The result indicated by the complement can be either intended or unintended, or it can be the natural outcome of the action of the verb. Resultative complements can occur in narrative, expository and evaluative sentences, but not in descriptive sentences.

¹ There is a specific set of verbs in the vocabulary that indicates the end result of an action rather than the action itself, e.g. 破 pò 'broken', 倒 dào 'toppled' (see §10.1.2 below).

10.1.1 Adjectival resultative complements

Virtually any adjective can function as a resultative complement, but some are used much more often than others for this purpose. Generally speaking, commendatory adjectives indicate intended result and derogatory adjectives unintended results. In cases where the subject is inanimate or the adjective neutral, the result produced may be a description of a natural phenomenon.

他修好了我的汽车。

tā xiū hǎo le wǒde qìchē

(lit. he repair-good **le** my car) He repaired my car.

他撞坏了我的汽车。

tā zhuàng huài le wǒde qìchē

(lit. he collide-bad **le** my car)

He damaged my car (in a collision).

他们还没弄²清楚这个问题。

tāmen hái méi nòng qīngchū zhèi ge wèntí

(lit. they still not handle-clear this mw problem)

They still haven't clarified this problem.

妹妹算错了那道题。

mèimei suàn cuò le nài dào tí

(lit. younger sister calculate-wrong **le** that mw question)

Younger sister got that (maths/math) question wrong.

太阳照亮了大地。

tàiyáng zhào liàng le dàdì

(lit. sun shine-bright **le** earth) The sun lit up the world.

晚霞染红了西边的天空。

wǎnxiá rǎn hóng le xībian de tiānkōng

(lit. sunset clouds dye-red **le** western **de** sky)

The evening sun coloured the western sky red.

妈妈整理好(了)床铺。

māma zhěnglǐ hǎo (le) chuángpù

(lit. mother put-in-order-well bedclothes)

Mother straightened the bed-clothes.

姐姐抹干净(了)桌子。

jiějie mā gānjìng (le) zhuōzi

(lit. elder sister wipe-clean table) Elder sister wiped the table clean.

² 弄 nòng 'to handle' is used widely in colloquial speech, rather like 'get' in English.

Note that in the last two examples the completed action aspect marker 了 *le* is likely to become optional for reasons of rhythm, when either the verb or the complement is disyllabic.

Common resultative adjectives are mostly monosyllables from the adjectival lexicon of the language, including the following: 饱 *bǎo* ‘full from eating’, 醉 *zuì* ‘drunk’, 对 *duì* ‘correct’.

10.1.2 Verbal resultative complements

A limited set of so-called result verbs function as resultative complements. They tend to indicate the end result of an action rather than an action itself.

弟弟做完了他的作业。 *dìdì zuò wán le tāde zuòyè*

(lit. younger brother do-finish *le* his homework)

Younger brother finished his homework.

爷爷寄走了那封给奶奶的信。

yéye jì zǒu le nài fēng gěi nǎinai de xìn

(lit. grandpa send-go that mw give grandma *de* letter)

Grandpa sent the letter to grandma.

大风吹倒了那棵大树。

dà fēng chuī dǎo le nài kē dà shù

(lit. typhoon blow-topple *le* that large tree)

The typhoon blew down that large tree.

那个小男孩打破了一只盘子。

nèi ge xiǎo nánhái dǎ pò le yī zhī pánzi

(lit. that mw little boy hit-break *le* one mw plate)

That little boy broke a plate.

Other common verbal resultatives are: 掉 *diào* ‘drop’, 着 *zháo* ‘reach, find’, 到 *dào* ‘attain, achieve’, 开 *kāi* ‘separate’.

10.1.3 Resultative complements in 把 *bǎ*, 被 *bèi* and notional passive constructions

Resultative complements feature commonly in 把 *bǎ*, 被 *bèi* and notional passive constructions, where the sentence ends with the outcome encoded by the complement:³

³ Note that sentences like these tend to be *le*-expository sentences.

电工把电线剪断了。 **diàngōng bǎ diànxìàn jiǎn duàn le**
(lit. electrician **ba** wire cut-break **le**) The electrician cut the wire.

洪水把稻田淹没了。 **hóngshuǐ bǎ dàoitián yān mò le**
(lit. flood **ba** paddy field inundate-submerge **le**)
The flood inundated the paddy fields.

剩菜被妈妈倒掉了。 **shèngcài bèi māma dào diào le**
(lit. left-overs **bei** mother tip-drop **le**)
The left-overs were thrown away by mother.

树被大风吹倒了。 **shù bèi dà fēng chuī dǎo le**
(lit. tree cv:by big wind blow-topple **le**)
The tree was blown down in the gale.

信已经寄走了。 **xìn yǐjīng jì zǒu le**
(lit. letter already send-go **le**) The letter has already been sent.

衣服都晾干了。 **yīfu dōu liàng gān le**
(lit. clothes all dry-in-air-dry **le**) The clothes are all dried.

电话马上接通了。 **diànhuà mǎshàng jiē tōng le**
(lit. telephone immediately connect-through **le**)
The telephone call immediately got through.

10.1.4 Resultative complements and intended/expected outcomes in imperative sentences

In addition to indicating results that have already been achieved in a narrative context, resultative complements, when they occur in imperative sentences, can point to outcomes that are intended or expected:

请叠好这些衣服！ **qǐng dié hǎo zhèxiē yīfu**
(lit. please fold-well these clothes) Please fold up these clothes.

别弄坏我的照相机！ **bié nòng huài wǒde zhàoxiàngjī**
(lit. don't handle-bad my camera) Don't break my camera.

拿走你的东西！ **ná zǒu nǐde dōngxi**
(lit. take-go your things) Take away your things.

请把垃圾倒掉。 **qǐng bǎ lājī dào diào**
(lit. please cv:grasp garbage tip-fall) Please tip out the garbage.

别把杯子摔破。 **bié bǎ bēizi shuāi pò**
(lit. don't cv:grasp glass drop-break) Please don't drop the glass.

10.2 Potential complements

If resultative complements indicate results that are intended or unintended or are natural outcomes, potential complements point to results that are projected by the speaker to be possible or impossible. They are constructed by placing 得 *de* for positive potential or 不 *bu* for negative potential between the verb and the adjectival or verbal complements we have seen in §10.1 above. Sentences with potential complements tend to take an objective stance and the ability or inability to carry out the action expressed in the verb may arise at least in part from circumstances beyond the control of the speaker. Potential complements are therefore essentially expository.

10.2.1 Adjectival potential complements

这张照片放得大放不大?

zhèi zhāng zhàopiàn fàngdà fàngbùdà

(lit. this mw photo expand *de* large expand not large)

Can this photograph be enlarged or not?

不戴眼镜，我看不清楚黑板上的字。

bù dài yǎnjìng | wǒ kànbuqīngchū hēibǎn shàng de zì

(lit. not wear glasses, I see-not-clear blackboard-on *de* Chinese characters)

I can't see the words on the blackboard clearly without my glasses on.

你弄得明白这个问题吗？**nǐ nòngdemíngbái zhèi ge wèntí ma?**

(lit. you handle *de* clear this mw question *ma*)

Can you work out what the problem is?

10.2.2 Verbal potential complements

昨晚我睡不着。**zuó wǎn wǒ shuìbuzháo**

(lit. yesterday night I sleep not go-to-sleep)

I could not go to sleep last night.

婴儿还断不了奶。**yīng'ér hái duànbuliǎo nǎi**

(lit. baby still stop not end milk)

The baby cannot be weaned from breast-feeding yet.

这场球打得赢吗？**zhèi chǎng qiú dǎdeyíng ma**

(lit. this game ball hit *de* win *ma*)

Can [we] win this game (of football/basketball, etc.)?

10.2.3 Potential directional complements

这么多，我吃不下了。zhème duō | wǒ chībuxià le

(lit. such a lot, I eat not down *le*)

This is too much. I can't eat any more.

他的名字你想得起来吗？tāde míngzi nǐ xiǎngdeqǐlai ma

(lit. his name you think *de* up *ma*) Can you remember his name?

你猜得出他的年龄吗？nǐ cāidechū tāde niánlíng ma

(lit. you guess *de* out his age *ma*) Can you guess how old he is?

那么高的地方我们老人爬不上去。

nàme gāo de difang wǒmen lǎorén pábushàngqu

(lit. such high *de* place we old people climb not ascend-go)

Old people like us cannot climb to such a high place.

对不起，我现在走不开。duìbuqǐ | wǒ xiànzài zǒubukāi

(lit. sorry, I now leave-not-separate) Sorry, I can't get away now.

10.2.4 Figurative uses and other features of resultative complements

Verbal, particularly directional complements, regularly have meanings beyond physical movement:

他这样说我受不了。tā zhèyàng shuō wǒ shòubuliǎo

(lit. he this kind say I bear not end)

I cannot put up with what he says.

他们看不起我。tāmen kànbuqǐ wǒ

(lit. they look not up me)

They look down on me.

这辆车坐得下五个人。zhèi liàng chē zuòdexià wǔ ge rén

(lit. this mw car sit *de* down five mw people)

This car can seat/take five people.

我买不起那幅画儿。wǒ mǎibuqǐ nài fú huàr

(lit. I buy not rise that mw picture)

I cannot afford (to buy) that picture.

你要想得开。nǐ yào xiǎngdekāi

(lit. you should think *de* separate)

You should take [it] philosophically.

10.3 Complements of manner and consequential state

Complements of manner are formed by placing 得 *de* after a verbal predicate followed by an adjectival phrase, which specifies the way in which the action of the verb is carried out or seen to be carried out. They delineate the observable manner or result of the action and by definition they are likely to be found in expository sentences. They can therefore be distinguished from pre-verbal adverbial modifiers of manner with 地 *de*,⁴ which are more concerned with the attitude or approach of the initiator of the action, and which tend to feature more in narrative or descriptive sentences. If there is an object in a sentence with a complement of manner, it must be shifted to the beginning of the sentence as a topic or be placed pre-verbally after the coverb 把 *bǎ*. The words or expressions found in the complement are usually: (a) an adjective, normally modified by a degree adverb like 很 *hěn* ‘very’ or by a degree complement of its own; (b) a phonaesthetised adjective; or (c) a reduplicated adjective.

⁴ See Chapter 9.

- (a) degree adverb + adjective or adjective + degree complement:

那个姑娘打扮得很漂亮。

nèi ge gūniang dǎban de hěn piàoliang

(lit. that mw girl dress *de* very beautiful)

That girl is beautifully dressed.

事情解决得十分完满。

shìqíng jiějué de shífēn wánmǎn

(lit. matter resolve *de* entirely perfect)

The matter has been resolved perfectly.

她钢琴弹得好极了。

tā gāngqín tán de hǎo jí le

(lit. she piano play *de* good extremely *le*)

She plays the piano extremely well.

这个翻译中文说得流畅得很。

zhèi ge fānyì zhōngwén shuō de liúchàng de hěn

(lit. this mw interpreter Chinese speak *de* fluently *de* very)

This interpreter speaks Chinese extremely fluently.

- (b) adjective + disyllabic phonaesthemes + 的 *de*:

他把杯子擦得亮铮铮的。

tā bǎ bēizi cā de liàngzhēngzhēng de

(lit. he cv:grasp glass rub *de* shining *de*)

He polished the glass so that it shone.

孩子长得胖乎乎的。

háizi zhǎng de pàngūhū de

(lit. child grow **de** chubby **de**)

The child is/has grown chubby.

那个老头子喝得醉醺醺的。

nèi ge lǎotóuzi hē de zuìxūnxūn de

(lit. that mw old man drink **de** drunk **de**)

That old man got drunk.

(c) reduplicated monosyllabic or disyllabic adjectives + (的 **de**):

大门关得紧紧的。

dà mén guān de jǐnjǐn de

(lit. big gate shut **de** tight **de**)

The main gate was tightly shut.

屋子整理得干干净净(的)。

wūzi zhěnglǐ de gāngānjìngjìng (de)

(lit. room tidy **de** clean **de**)

The room was tidied nice and clean.

他把事件的经过说得清清楚楚的。

tā bǎ shìjiàn de jīngguò shuō de qīngqīngchǔchǔ de

(lit. he cv:grasp event **de** course tell **de** clear **de**)

He explained clearly the course of events.

In complements of consequential state the adjectival phrase is replaced by: (a) a verbal phrase; (b) a clause; or (c) a quadrisyllabic idiom. They differ from complements of manner in that they may follow either an adjectival or a verbal predicate, but in other ways they are similar in function: an object, if present, must come before the predicate; and they are likewise expository in tone, since they elaborate on what is observed to result, intentionally or otherwise, from the action of the predicate verb or from the situation described by the adjectival predicative.

(a) verbal phrase:

树被大风吹得左右摇摆。

shù bèi dà fēng chuī de zuǒyòu yáobǎi

(lit. tree cv:by big wind blow **de** left-right-sway)

The tree was swaying from left to right in the force
of the gale.

他笑得直不起腰来。

tā xiào de zhíbuqǐ yāo lái

(lit. he laugh **de** straight-not-rise-waist come)

He laughed so much he couldn't straighten up.

妈妈伤心得睡不着觉。

māma shāngxīn de shuìbuzháo jiào

(lit. mother sad **de** sleep not tight sleep)

Mother was so sad that she could not go to sleep.

这个人胖得扣不上外衣的纽扣。

zhèi ge rén pàng de kòubushàng wàiyī de niǔkòu

(lit. this **ge** person fat **de** fasten-not up coat **de** buttons)

This person was so fat he could not button up his coat.

这些东西放得不是地方。

zhèi xiē dōngxi fàng de bù shì dìfang

(lit. these things put **de** is not place)

These things have been put in the wrong place.

你来得不是时候。

nǐ lái de bù shì shíhòu

(lit. you come **de** is not time)

You have come at the wrong time.

(b) clause:

她哭得眼睛都红了。

tā kū de yǎnjīng dōu hóng le

(lit. she weep **de** eyes all red **le**)

Her eyes were red with weeping.

老太太气得全身发抖。

lǎo tài tai qì de quánshēn fādǒu

(lit. old lady angry **de** whole body tremble)

The old lady trembled with anger.

她高兴得嘴巴都合不拢了。

tā gāoxìng de zuǐba dōu hébulǒng le

(lit. she happy **de** mouth also close not together **le**)

She was so happy that she was beaming all the time.

他们冷得牙齿直打战。

tāmen lěng de yáchǐ zhí dǎzhàn

(lit. they cold **de** teeth continuously chatter)

They were so cold their teeth were chattering.

(c) quadrisyllabic idioms:

桌子上的东西堆得乱七八糟。

zhuōzi shàng de dōngxi duī de luànqībāzāo

(lit. table-top **de** things pile **de** untidy)

The things on the table were piled up untidily.

他回答得干脆利落。

tā huídá de gāncuì lìluo

(lit. he reply **de** clear-cut)

He gave a clear-cut response.

地毯旧得一钱不值。

dìtǎn jiù de yīqiánbùzhí

(lit. carpet old **de** one-cash-not-worth)

The carpet was so old it was not worth a penny.

这种药苦得难以下咽。

zhèi zhǒng yào kǔ de nányǐ xià yàn

(lit. this kind medicine bitter **de** difficult to swallow)

This medicine is too bitter to swallow.

10.4 Complements of direction

What is discussed in this section has been mostly covered in 8.5.2. It is included here to complete the list of possible complements⁵.

⁵ For a complete list of directional indicators see the chart in 8.5.2.

10.4.1 Literal uses

(a) spatial (indicating different directions):

听到这个好消息，他高兴得跳了起来。

tīng dào zhèi ge hǎo xiāoxi | tā gāoxìng de tiào le qīlai

(lit. hear this mw good news, he happy **de** leap **le** come-up)

When he heard this good news, he leapt up with joy.

女主人走上去和客人一一握手。

nǚzhǔrén zǒu shàngqu hé kèren yīyī wòshǒu

(lit. hostess walk up go with guests one one shake hands)

The hostess walked forward and shook hands with the guests one by one.

这是次品，把它退回去。

zhè shì cǐpǐn | bǎ tā tuì huíqù

(lit. this is defective goods, cv:take them send back go)

These are defective goods, send them back.

他转过头来向我笑了笑。

tā zhuǎn guò tóu lái xiàng wǒ xiào le xiào

(lit. he turn back head go cv:towards me smile **le** smile)

He turned his head and smiled at me.

(b) temporal (indicating continuation or inception):

坚持下去！

jiānchí xiàqù

(lit. persevere down go)

Stick it out!

别说下去了。我不想听下去了。

bié shuō xiàqù le | wǒ bù xiǎng tīng xiàqù le

(lit. don't speak-continue. I not want hear-continue)

Don't go on. I don't want to hear any more.

天气渐渐暖和起来。

tiānqì jiànjiàn nuǎnhuo qǐlái

(lit. weather gradually warm rise)

The weather gradually became warmer.

他爱上了她。

tā ài shàng le tā

(lit. he fall in love **le** her)

He fell in love with her.

10.4.2 *Figurative uses (indicating success, good judgement, etc. or, if with a negator, failure, etc.)*

他考上了大学。

tā kǎo shàng le dàxué

(lit. he take examination reach **le** university)

He passed (the examination) for the university.

你提的问题我答不上来。

nǐ tí de wèntí wǒ dábushànglái

(lit. you raise **de** question I reply not come up)

I can't answer the question you raise.

灯光慢慢地暗了下来。

dēngguāng màn mǎn de àn le xiàlai

(lit. lamplight slowly **de** dim **le** go down)

The light slowly dimmed.

她把省下来的钱存起来。

tā bǎ shěng xiàlai de qián cún qǐlai

(lit. he take save come down **de** money deposit up come)

She deposited the money she had saved.

看起来天快要下雨了。

kàn qǐlai tiān kuài yào xià yǔ le

(lit. look up come heaven going to fall rain **le**)

It looks as though it is going to rain.

你一个人应付得过来吗？

nǐ yī ge rén yìngfu de guòlai ma

(lit. you one mw person deal **de** come over **ma**)

Can you deal with it by yourself?

我一眼就认出他来了。

wǒ yī yǎn jiù rèn chū tā lái le

(lit. I one eye then recognise out him come **le**)

With one look I recognised him.

那道题你算出来了没有？

nèi dào tí nǐ suàn chūlai le méiyǒu

(lit. that mw question you calculate come out **le** not have)

Did you solve that question?

你吃出什么味儿了吗？

nǐ chī chū shénme wèir le ma

(lit. you eat out any taste **le ma**)

Can you tell what it tastes of?

她不好意思地把脸捂了起来。

tā bù hǎo yìsi de bǎ liǎn wǔ le qǐlai

(lit. she feel embarrassed **de** take face over **le** come up)

She covered her face in embarrassment.

Chapter 11

Coverbs

Coverbs are a specific set of verbs in the Chinese language that are similar to English prepositions. They are called coverbs because they almost invariably have to be used in conjunction with other verbs in a sentence.¹ For example:

小李对我笑了笑。

xiǎolǐ duì wǒ xiào le xiào (coverb: 对 **duì** 'towards; facing')

(lit. little Li cv:towards me smile **le** smile) Little Li smiled at me.

我们向前走。

wǒmen xiàng qián zǒu qu (coverb: 向 **xiàng** 'heading towards')

(lit. we cv:towards ahead go) We went forward/ahead.

他来自北方。 **tā lái zì běifāng** (coverb: 自 **zì** 'from')

(lit. he come cv:from north) He comes from the north.

她一口气走到学校。

tā yīkǒuqì zǒu dào xuéxiào (coverb: 到 **dào** 'arriving at')

(lit. she in one breath walk cv:arriving at school)

She walked straight through to school.

¹ Most coverbs must be followed by a verb in the sentence. Some, however, can function as independent verbs, e.g. 在 **zài**. In 他在家休息 **tā zài jiā xiūxi** 'He's resting at home', 在 **zài** is a coverb; but in 他不在家 **tā bù zài jiā** 'He's not at home', it is a verb.

One cannot say:

*小李对我。

***xiǎolǐ duì wǒ**

*Xiao Li towards me.

*我们向前。

***wǒmen xiàng qián**

*We ahead.

*他自北方。

***tā zì běifāng**

*He from north.

*她到²学校。

***tā dào xuéxiào**

*She arriving at school.

² 到 **dào** like 在 **zài** can also be used as a full verb, but as such it needs to be aspect-marked, e.g. 她下午两点到了学校 **tā xiàwǔ liǎng diǎn dào le xuéxiào** 'She arrived at the school at two o'clock in the afternoon'.

Coverbs introduce expressions covering a wide range of factors, including location, direction, timing, association, means, instrument, etc., and they are also essential elements in a number of grammatical constructions. These are all detailed below in §11.2. In most cases, coverbs are placed before the main verb in the sentence, the general formula being:

subject + coverbal expression + main verb

In some cases, as can be seen from the third and fourth examples above, the coverb may come after the main verb. This positioning is determined by meaning and is most common when the reference is to location or direction.³

The most important coverbs used in the language in terms of semantic categories are listed at §11.2. For example, 向 *xiàng* ‘in the direction of’, 朝 *cháo* ‘towards’, 往 *wǎng* or *wàng* ‘going to’, and 奔 *bèn* ‘heading for’ belong to the same semantic category. Coverbs like these within one category can generally be used interchangeably, but there are often particular features associated with their use as well as differences between them, which we will call **peer characteristics**.

We will first examine the nature of these peer characteristics before listing the semantic categories of coverbs.

³ See §11.1 below.

11.1 Peer characteristics

11.1.1 *Register*

Though coverbs in a semantic category broadly function in the same way, they do have differences in register usually associated with stylistic and regional distinctions.

For example, to say ‘I’ll go with him’, the following options might be open:⁴

我和他一起去。	wǒ hé tā yīqǐ qù	(neut.)
我跟他一起去。	wǒ gēn tā yīqǐ qù	(northern dialect: colloq.)
我同他一起去。	wǒ tóng tā yīqǐ qù	(southern dialect: colloq.)
我与他同行。	wǒ yǔ tā tóngxíng	(fml. and class.)

The choice would be made purely in terms of formality of style.

⁴ See §11.2 below.

11.1.2 Collocational

Collocational features are more lexical than grammatical in nature and they are part of language idiom. They dictate that some, if not all, the coverbs in a category may occur with a particular noun. Various possibilities are listed below within the category ‘at the most opportune moment’. For example: 乘 **chéng**, 趁 **chèn**, and 随 **suí** may all collocate with 机 **jī** ‘opportunity’, but not 就 **jiù** and 顺 **shùn**:

乘机	chéng jī	making use of the opportunity
趁机	chèn jī	taking the opportunity
随机	suí jī	acting accordingly
*就机	jiù jī	
*顺机	shùn jī	

All five of them match with 便 **biàn** ‘convenience’:

顺便	shùn biàn	while one is at or about something
就便	jiù biàn	as is convenient
随便	suí biàn	as one pleases
趁便	chèn biàn	at one’s convenience
乘便	chéng biàn	when convenient

顺 **shùn**, 就 **jiù**, 趁 **chèn** and 乘 **chéng** link with 势 **shì** ‘momentum’, but not 随 **suí**:

顺势	shùn shì	taking advantage of someone’s error
就势	jiù shì	making use of the momentum
趁势	chèn shì	taking advantage of a favourable situation
乘势	chéng shì	taking advantage of the situation
*随势	suí shì	

就 **jiù** and 随 **suí** both collocate with 地 **dì** ‘place’, while the others do not:

就地	jiù dì	on the spot
随地	suí dì	at any place where one is – anywhere

11.1.3 Governmental

Coverbs, like other transitive verbs, invariably take objects. Governmental characteristics refer to the fact that the object governed by a particular coverb may take diverse forms. Generally, the object is a noun or nominal expression, but in some cases it may be an adjective, a verb or verb phrase, or even a clause. For example, in the case of the coverb 趁 **chèn** ‘taking

the opportunity of’ from the category cited above, the object may take the form of a noun, an adjective, a verb phrase, or a clause:

趁机 **chèn jī** taking the opportunity

(机 **jī** ‘opportunity’: an abbreviated noun)

趁热 **chèn rè** [eating or drinking something] while it is hot

(热 **rè** ‘hot’: an adjective)

趁下雨 **chèn xià yǔ** [doing something] while it is raining

(下雨 **xià yǔ** ‘to rain’: a verb)

趁天晴 **chèn tiān qíng** [doing something] while the weather is fine

(天晴 **tiān qíng** ‘it is fine’: a clause)

The governing capacity of individual coverbs varies greatly.

11.1.4 Prosodic

Most coverbs are monosyllabic. However, there are quite a few which have disyllabic alternatives. While monosyllabic coverbs may occur with monosyllabic, disyllabic or multi-syllabic objects, disyllabic coverbs function only with disyllabic or multi-syllabic objects. For example, 按 **àn** ‘according to’ can be used freely as follows:

按理	àn lǐ	according to reason, normally
按道理	àn dào lǐ	according to reason
按实际情况	àn shí jì qíng kuàng	according to/in the light of actual circumstances

But its disyllabic alternative 按照 **àn zhào** ‘in accordance with’ is more restricted, with the following two phrases being acceptable:

按照道理	àn zhào dào lǐ	according to reason
按照实际情况	àn zhào shí jì qíng kuàng	in the light of actual circumstances

but not:

*按照理	* àn zhào lǐ	*according to reason
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11.1.5 Sequential

As a general rule, coverbs occur before the main verb in the sentence. However, where a coverb indicates location or direction, it may come after the verb. For example, within the category with the meaning ‘in the direction of’ (see §11.2.1.1), 向 **xiàng** ‘towards’ and 往 **wàng/wǎng** ‘heading

for’ may be used before or after the main verb in the sentence, while most of the others occur only pre-verbally.⁵ It must, however, be noted that all post-verbal uses are restricted in one way or another. For example, 向 *xiàng* in the pre-verbal position can govern any noun (or pronoun):

他向我走来。 **tā xiàng wǒ zǒu lai**

(lit. he cv:towards me walk come) He walked towards me.

⁵ 于 *yú*, with its origins in Classical Chinese, is the only coverb in this category that is used post-verbally.

whereas post-verbally its noun object is likely to be limited to an abstract idea:

我们从胜利走向胜利。 **wǒmen cóng shènglì zǒu xiàng shènglì**

(lit. we cv:from victory go cv:towards victory)

We went from victory to victory.

这不是走向光明；这是走向死亡。

zhè bù shì zǒu xiàng guāngmíng | zhè shì zǒu xiàng sǐwáng

(lit. this not is go cv:towards brightness; this is go cv:towards death)

This is not heading for glory; this is heading for death.

In the case of 往 *wǎng/wàng*, the post-verbal restriction relates to the verb, which is limited to examples like 开 *kāi* (of a car) ‘to head for’:

她往海边走去。 **tā wǎng hǎibiān zǒu qu**

(lit. she cv:heading for shore walk go)

She walked towards the shore (sea).

这班车开往上海。 **zhè bān chē kāiwǎng shànghǎi**

(lit. this mw vehicle travel cv:heading for Shanghai)

This bus/train is going to Shanghai.

In addition to the above, 到 *dào* ‘arriving at, to’ is used freely in pre- and post-verbal positions. For examples, see §11.2.1.3, and §11.2.2.3 below.

11.1.6 Usage

Usage differences highlight the specific ways some coverbs are used. For example, in the category of ‘along’, 沿 *yán* ‘alongside’ does not occur with verbs of motion, while its disyllabic counterpart 沿着 *yánzhe* does:

沿路都是商店。 **yán lù dōu shì shāngdiàn**

(lit. cv:alongside road all is shops) There are shops all along the road.

他们沿着大路走去。 **tāmen yán zhe dà lù zǒu qu**

(lit. they cv:along main road walk go) They walked along the road.

The first example above also illustrates the fact that 沿 *yán* is one of a limited number of coverbs that can be used as sentence beginners. Other examples are:

靠墙摆着一张床。 **kào qiáng bǎi zhe yī zhāng chuáng**
(lit. cv:against wall place **zhe** one mw bed) Against the wall was a bed.

临窗放着一张桌子。 **lín chuāng fàng zhe yī zhāng zhuōzi**
(lit. cv:beside window place **zhe** one mw table)
Next to the window was a table.

11.2 Semantic categories

We list here the semantic categories of coverbs. For each category a table is given summarising their characteristics: usage (indicating, where appropriate, dynamic and/or static nature, sentence beginners, etc.); register (informal, formal, colloquial, etc.); collocational (detailing specific association with specific nouns, where this occurs); governmental (identifying the possible grammatical form of the item governed by the coverb, e.g. noun, pronoun, etc.); prosodic (providing examples of alternative disyllabic coverbs, where they exist); and sequential (indicating whether the coverbs occur only before the main verb, or either before or after it).

11.2.1 Direction and position

11.2.1.1 Towards or in the direction of

朝 *cháo*: towards, facing:

他朝我走过来。 **tā cháo wǒ zǒu guòlái**
(lit. he cv:towards me walk cross come) He walked over to me.

他朝我笑了笑。 **tā cháo wǒ xiào le xiào**
(lit. he cv:facing me smile **le** smile) He smiled at me.

我们朝前看去。 **wǒmen cháo qián kàn qu**
(lit. we cv:towards front look-go) We looked ahead.

向 *xiàng*: towards:

飞机向东边飞去。 **fēijī xiàng dōngbian fēi qu**
(lit. plane cv:towards east-side fly-go) The plane flew east.

走到路口，然后向左转。

zǒu dào lù kǒu | ránhòu xiàng zuǒ zhuǎn

(lit. walk cv:arriving crossroads, afterwards cv:towards left turn)

Go to the crossroads and then turn left.

我向窗外望去。**wǒ xiàng chuāng wài wàng qu**

(lit. I cv.towards window-outside gaze-go) I looked out of the window.

我有点事儿向你请教。**wǒ yǒu diǎn shìr xiàng nǐ qǐngjiào**

(lit. I have mw little matter cv:towards you seek advice)

I would like your advice on a small matter.

她向我点了点头。**tā xiàng wǒ diǎn le diǎn tóu**

(lit. she cv:towards me nod **le** nod head) She nodded to me.

望 **wàng**: towards, to:

汽车望南开去。**qìchē wàng nán kāi qu**

(lit. car cv:towards south drive-go) The car drove south.

往 **wǎng/wàng**: in the direction of:

妈妈往厨房走去。**māma wǎng/wàng chúfáng zǒu qu**

(lit. mother cv:towards kitchen walk-go)

Mother walked to the kitchen.

山脉往东延伸。**shānmài wǎng/wàng dōng yánshēn**

(lit. mountain range cv:towards east stretch)

The mountain range stretched to the east.

这班车开往上海。**zhè bān chē kāi wǎng/wàng shànghǎi**

(lit. this mw train travel cv: towards Shanghai)

This train is going to Shanghai.

奔 **bèn**: heading for:

汽艇奔码头开去。**qìtǐng bèn mǎtóu kāi qu**

(lit. motorboat cv:heading for dock travel-go)

The motorboat headed for the dock.

于 **yú**: to:

这是问道于盲。**zhè shì wèn dào yú máng**

(lit. this is ask way cv:to blind) This is asking a blind person the way.

我得求救于人。**wǒ děi qiújiù yú rén**

(lit. I had to cry for help cv: to person)

I had to call someone to come to the rescue.

为 wèi: to:
此事不足为外人道。cǐ shì bù zú wèi wàirén dào
(lit. this matter not worth cv:to outsider speak)
This matter is not for outsiders to hear.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
朝 chāo	dynamic/ static	infml.		n, pron	朝着 cháozhe	pre-vb
向 xiàng	dynamic/ static	fml.		n, pron	向着 xiàngzhe	pre-/ post-vb
望 wàng	dynamic	colloq.		n		pre-vb
往 wǎng/ wàng	dynamic	neut.		n		pre-/ post-vb
奔 bèn	dynamic	slang		n		pre-vb
于 yú	static	class.		n		post-vb
为 wèi	static	obs.	...道 dào 'to inform'	n		pre-vb

11.2.1.2 From (a starting-point)

从 cóng: from:
我刚从北京回来。
wǒ gāng cóng běijīng huílai
(lit. I just cv:from Beijing return-come)
I have just come back from Beijing.
我从他那儿得到你的消息。
wǒ cóng tā nàr dédào nǐde xiāoxi
(lit. I cv:from his there obtain your news)
I got your news from his place.

由 yóu: from:
游行队伍由天安门出发。
yóuxíng duìwǔ yóu tiān'ānmén chūfā
(lit. march ranks cv:from Tiananmen start out)
The procession started from Tiananmen.

风向突然变了，由北向南刮起来。

fēngxiàng tūrán biàn le | yóu běi xiàng nán guā qǐlai

(lit. wind direction suddenly change **le**, cv:from north cv:towards south blow-begin)

The direction of the wind suddenly changed and it began to blow from north to south.

打 **dǎ**: from:

咱们打这儿走吧。 **zánmen dǎ zhèr zǒu ba**

(lit. we cv:from here go **ba**) Let's go from here.

她打窗户里往外看。 **tā dǎ chuānghu li wǎng wài kàn**

(lit. she cv:from window-inside cv:towards outside look)

She looked out of the window.

于 **yú**: from, at:

他毕业于英国利兹大学。 **tā bìyè yú yīngguó lìzī dàxué**

(lit. he graduate cv:from England Leeds university)

He graduated from Leeds University in England.

黄河发源于青海。 **huánghé fāyuán yú qīnghǎi**

(lit. Yellow River has source cv:from Qinghai)

The Yellow River rises in Qinghai.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
从 cóng	dynamic	neut.		n, pron		pre-vb
由 yóu	dynamic	fml.		n		pre-vb
打 dǎ	dynamic	colloq.		n		pre-vb
于 yú	dynamic	class.		n, pron		post-vb

11.2.1.3 Going to or arriving at (a destination)

到 **dào**: to, arriving at:

你到哪儿去? **nǐ dào nǎr qù**

(lit. you cv:to where go) Where are you going to?

我一口气跑到车站。 **wǒ yīkǒuqì pǎo dào chēzhàn**

(lit. I in one breath run cv:to station)

I ran straight to the bus/coach/railway station.

他下午到医院看病去。

tā xiàwǔ dào yīyuàn kàn bìng qu

(lit. he afternoon cv:to hospital see-to illness go)

He is going/went in the afternoon to the hospital for treatment.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
到 dào	dynamic	neut.		n		pre-/post-vb

11.2.1.4 Along

沿 **yán**: along, alongside:

沿河开满了鲜花。 **yán hé kāi mǎn le xiānhuā**

(lit. cv:along river open-full **le** fresh flower)

There are flowers blooming all along the river.

沿着 **yán zhe**: along:

我们沿着大街一直走去。

wǒmen yán zhe dàjiē yīzhí zǒu qu

(lit. we cv:along main road straight walk-go)

We walked straight down the main road.

缘 **yuán**: along:

缘木求鱼。 **yuán mù qiú yú** (lit. cv:along tree seek fish)

Seek fish up a tree. [i.e. bark up the wrong tree]

挨 **āi**: in sequence:

他挨家挨户去询问。 **tā āijiā āihù qù xúnwèn**

(lit. he cv:in sequence house cv:in sequence door go enquire)

He made enquiries from door to door.

顺 **shùn**: along:

我顺路把信投进邮筒。

wǒ shùn lù bǎ xìn tóu jìn yóutǒng

(lit. I cv:along road cv:grasp letter put in postbox)

On the way I posted the letter.

他们顺着河边慢慢地走着。

tāmen shùnzhe hébiān mànmande zǒu zhe

(lit. they cv:along riverside slow-slow **de** walk **zhe**)

They walked slowly along the river (bank).

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
沿 yán	static	neut.		n	see 沿着 yánzhe	pre-vb
沿着 yán zhe	dynamic	neut.		n	see 沿 yán	pre-vb
缘 yuán	dynamic	class.	木 mù 'tree'	n		pre-vb
挨 āi	dynamic	colloq.	家 jiā 'house'	n		pre-vb
顺 shùn	dynamic	infml.	路 lù 'way' 藤 téng 'vine'	n	顺着 shùnzhe	pre-vb

11.2.1.5

Facing

对 **duì**: to, facing:
 你对他说了些什么？ **nǐ duì tā shuō le xiē shénme**
 (lit. you cv:to him say **le** mw:some what) What did you say to him?

对着 **duìzhe**: facing:
 他对着镜子梳了梳头发。 **tā duì zhe jìngzi shū le shū tóufa**
 (lit. he cv:facing mirror comb **le** comb hair)
 He combed his hair in front of the mirror.

迎 **yíng**: facing, against:
 彩旗迎风招展。 **cǎiqí yíng fēng zhāozhǎn**
 (lit. coloured flag cv:facing wind flutter) The bunting fluttered in the wind.

当 **dāng**: facing, before:
 阴谋当众败露。 **yīnmóu dāng zhòng bàilù**
 (lit. plot cv:before crowd fail-expose)
 The plot was exposed before everyone/in public.

当着 **dāng zhe**: facing, before:
 请你当着大家的面把问题说清楚吧。
qǐng nǐ dāng zhe dàjiā de miàn bǎ wèntí shuō qīngchu ba
 (lit. please you cv:before everyone's face cv:grasp problem speak-clear **ba**)
 Please make clear the problem in front of everyone.

劈 pī: closely facing, right against:

我劈头碰见小王。wǒ pī tóu pèngjiàn xiǎowáng
(lit. I cv:right against head bump-see little Wang)
I bumped straight into Xiao Wang.

冲 chòng: facing, towards:

他冲我眨了眨眼。tā chòng wǒ zhǎ le zhǎ yǎn
(lit. he cv:towards me wink le wink eye) He winked at me.

冲着 chòng zhe: facing, towards:

风很大，别冲着窗口坐。
fēng hěn dà | bié chòng zhe chuāngkǒu zuò
(lit. wind very strong, don't cv:facing window sit)
The wind is very strong, don't sit facing the window.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
对 duì	static	neut.		n, pron	对着 duìzhe	pre-vb
迎 yíng	dynamic	fml.	面 miàn 'face' 风 fēng 'wind'	n		pre-vb
当 dāng	static	colloq.	面 miàn 'face' 场 chǎng 'place'	n	当着 dāngzhe	pre-vb
劈 pī	dynamic	colloq.	脸 liǎn 'face' 头 tóu 'head'	n, pron		'place'
冲 chòng	static	slang		n n, pron	冲着 chòngzhe	pre-vb pre-vb

11.2.1.6 Against

靠 kào: against, leaning on:

行人靠右边走。xíng rén kào yòu bian zǒu
(lit. pedestrians cv:against right-side walk) Pedestrians keep to the right.

临 **lín**: next to:

他临床替病人诊治。 **tā línchuáng tì bìng rén zhěnzhi**

(lit. she cv: next to bed cv:for patients diagnose treat)

She diagnoses and treats patients at the bedside.

凭 **píng**: leaning against:

他凭栏远眺。 **tā pínglán yuǎntiào**

(lit. he cv:leaning against balustrade distant-gaze)

Leaning on the balustrade he gazes into the distance.

货 **fù**: relying on:

敌人负隅顽抗。 **dírén fùyú wánkàng**

(lit. enemy cv:relying on corner stubbornly resist)

The enemy with their backs to the wall resisted stubbornly.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
靠 kào	static	neut.		n		pre-vb
临 lín	static	neut.		n		pre-vb
凭 píng	static	class.	栏 lán 'balustrade'	n		pre-vb
负 fù	static	class.	隅 yú 'corner'	n		pre-vb

11.2.1.7 At, in, on, etc.

在 **zài**: in, at, on:⁶

飞机在天空中盘旋。 **fēijī zài tiānkōng zhōng pánxuán**

(lit. plane cv:in air-middle circle) The plane circled in the air.

展览会在博物馆举行。 **zhǎnlǎnhuì zài bówùguǎn jǔxíng**

(lit. exhibition cv:in museum hold) The exhibition was held in the museum.

他在人群中挤来挤去。 **tā zài rénqún zhōng jǐlái jǐqù**

(lit. he cv:in crowd push-come push-go)

He pushed back and forth through the crowd.

在湖面上升起了一片水汽。

zài húmiàn shàng shēngqǐ le yīpiàn shuǐqì

(lit. cv:on lake surface-top rise-up **le** one mw:stretch vapour)

A bank of mist rose from the surface of the lake.

⁶ See also §8.2.

在 **zài** is the most versatile of coverbs in the way it governs its locational objects. Most commonly the object requires a postposition which indicates its position precisely:

在花园里 **zài huāyuán lǐ**

(lit. cv:in garden-inside) in the garden

在大树下 **zài dà shù xià**

(lit. cv:at large tree below) beneath the large tree

在桌子上 **zài zhuōzi shàng**

(cv:on table-top) on the table

在房子外面 **zài fángzi wàimian**

(cv:at house-outside) outside the house

However, if the location noun is trisyllabic, the postposition 里 **lǐ** ‘inside’ is usually omitted for prosodic reasons. For example:

哥哥在图书馆复习功课。

gēge zài túshūguǎn fùxí gōngkè

(lit. elder brother cv:in library revise lesson)

Elder brother is revising his lessons in the library.

弟弟在游乐场玩儿。

dìdì zài yóulèchǎng wánr

(lit. younger brother cv:in funfair play)

Younger brother was having a good time at the funfair.

爸爸在办公室办公。

bàba zài bàngōngshì bàngōng

(lit. father cv:in office work) Father is working in [his] office.

Postpositions other than 里 **lǐ**, can, of course, be used:

在游乐场外面 **zài yóulèchǎng wàimian**

outside the amusement park.

If the location is a place of work or study, a postposition is not needed:

姐姐在银行工作。 **jiějie zài yínháng gōngzuò**

(lit. elder sister cv:in bank work)

Elder sister works in a bank.

弟弟在大学上学。 **dìdì zài dàxué shàngxué**

(lit. younger brother cv:in university attend)

Younger brother is at university.

Likewise the postposition 里 *lǐ* is not used with a location as large as a country or city:

他在中国旅游。
tā zài zhōngguó lǚyóu
 (lit. he cv:in China tour) He is touring in China.

他们在北京居住。
tāmen zài běijīng jūzhù
 (lit. they cv:in Beijing live) They live in Beijing.

于 *yú*: in, at:

熊猫产于中国西南山区。
xióngmāo chǎn yú zhōngguó xīnán shānqū
 (lit. panda produce cv:in China south-west mountain region)
 Pandas are found in the mountain regions of southwest China.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
在 <i>zài</i>	static; as sentence beginner	neut.	里 <i>lǐ</i> may be included/excluded depending on noun involved	n		pre-/post-vb
于 <i>yú</i>		class.	postposition not often used	n		post-vb

11.2.1.8 Through

透过 *tòuguò*: through:

阳光透过玻璃窗照射进来。
yángguāng tòuguò bōlichuāng zhàoshè jìnlai
 (lit. sunlight cv:through glass window shine-in-come)
 The sunlight shone through the (glass) window.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
透过 <i>tòuguò</i>	neut.			n		pre-vb

11.2.1.9 Distance from

离 lí: from:

我家离大学不远。

⁷wǒ jiā lí dàxué bù yuǎn

(lit. my home cv:from university not far)

My home is not far from the university.

这儿离车站有两英里的路。

zhèr lí chēzhàn yǒu liǎng yīnglǐ de lù

(lit. here cv:from station there-are two mile **de** road/distance)

Here is two miles from the station.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
离 lí	static	neut.		n, pron		pre-vb

- ⁷ The predicate in a 离 lí sentence is often represented by an adjective or the verb 有 yǒu.

11.2.1.10 On the spot

就 jiù: at (where one is):

请大家就地坐下。

qǐng dàjiā jiùdì zuòxià

(lit. please everyone cv:where-one-is place sit down)

Would everyone please sit down where you are.

随 suí: at (any place one happens to be in):

请游客不要随地丢弃垃圾。

qǐng yóukè bù yào suídì diūqì lājī

(lit. please tourists do not cv:where-one-happens-to-be place discard rubbish/litter)

Would tourists please not drop litter everywhere.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
就 jiù		neut./fml.	地 dì 'place'	n		pre-vb
随 suí		neut.	地 dì 'place'	n		pre-vb

11.2.2 Time

11.2.2.1 At (a certain time)

在 zài: at:

教师在考试前帮助大家复习功课。

jiàoshī zài kǎoshì qián bāngzhù dàjiā fùxí gōngkè

(lit. teacher cv:at examination before help everyone revise lesson)

The teacher helped everyone with revision before the examination.

火车在中午十二点到达。

huǒchē zài zhōngwǔ shí'èr diǎn dàodá

(lit. train cv:at midday twelve o'clock arrive)

The train arrived at 12 o'clock midday.

开会日期定在下个月七号。

kāihuì rìqī dìng zài xià ge yuè qī hào

(lit. meeting time fix cv:at next mw month seventh day)

The time of the meeting is fixed for the 7th of next month.

于 yú: at:

大学于九月下旬开学。

dàxué yú jiǔyuè xiàxùn kāixué

(lit. university cv:at nine month last ten-day period start-study)

The university will open in the last week of September.

他于去年去世。

tā yú qùnián qùshì

(lit. he cv:at last year leave-the-world)

He died last year.

我生于一九五六年三月二十八日。

wǒ shēng yú yī jiǔ wǔ liù nián sānyuè èrshí bā rì

(lit. I born cv:at 1956 year 3rd month 28th day)

I was born on 28th March 1956.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
在 zài		neut.		n, pron		pre-/post-vb
于 yú		fml.		n, pron		pre-/post-vb

11.2.2.2 From or since (a certain time)

从 **cóng**: from, since:

他从小就喜爱音乐。

tā cóng xiǎo jiù xǐ'ài yīnyuè

(lit. he cv:from young then love music)

He has loved music since childhood.

她从来不失信用。

tā cónglái bù shī xìnyòng

(lit. she cv:from-past-till-now not break faith)

She has never broken faith.

我从明天起开始吃素。

wǒ cóng míngtiān qǐ kāishǐ chī sù⁸

(lit. I cv:from tomorrow begin start eat vegetarian diet)

From tomorrow I will start being a vegetarian/go on a
vegetarian diet.

⁸ 吃斋 **chīzhāi** also means 'to be on a vegetarian diet', but it is mainly used in a religious context.

自 **zì**: from, since:

本条例自即日起施行。

běn tiáoli zì jīrì qǐ shīxíng

(lit. this mw regulation cv:from this day begin operate)

This regulation will come into operation from today.

由 **yóu**: from:

课程由明年起改为学分制。

kèchéng yóu míngnián qǐ gǎi wéi xuéfēn zhì

(lit. course cv:from next year begin change to credit system)

The courses will be changed to a credit-system from next year.

打 **dǎ**: from, since:

你打什么时候起学会这套本领?

nǐ dǎ shénme shíhou qǐ xuéhuì zhèi tào běnlǐng

(lit. you cv:from what time begin learn-acquire this mw skill)

Since when have you mastered this skill?

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
从 cóng		neut.	time word, phrase + 起 qǐ adj e.g. 从小 xiǎo ‘since childhood’ v. e.g. 从来 lái ‘from past till now’	n, adj, v		pre-vb
自 zì		fml.	time word, phrase + 起 qǐ	n	自从 zìcóng	pre-/ post-vb
由 yóu		class.	time word, phrase + 起 qǐ	n		pre-vb
打 dǎ		colloq.	time word, phrase + 起 qǐ	n		pre-vb

11.2.2.3

Till (a certain time)

到 **dào**: to, till:

他到天亮时才睡觉。 **tā dào tiānliàng shí cái shuìjiào**
 (lit. he cv:till daylight time only then sleep)
 He did not go to bed till daybreak.

他一觉睡到大天亮。 **tā yī jiào shuì dào dà tiānliàng**
 (lit. he one sleep sleep cv:till broad daylight)
 He slept right through to daybreak.

至 **zhì**: to:

事情至此才有了眉目。 **shìqíng zhì cǐ cái yǒu le méimu**
 (lit. matter cv:till this only then have **le** prospect of solution)
 The matter only now has a prospect of solution.

她工作直至深夜。 **tā gōngzuò zhízhì shēnyè**
 (lit. she work direct cv:to deep night)
 She worked deep into the night.

迄 **qì**: till:

失踪人的下落迄今还没有消息。
shīzōng rén de xiàluò qìjīn hái méiyǒu xiāoxi
 (lit. lose-track-people **de** whereabouts cv:till now still not have news)
 There is still no news of the whereabouts of the missing people.

届 jiè: till, at:

这件事届时再跟你详谈。

zhèi jiàn shì jièshí zài gēn nǐ xiángtán

(lit. this mw matter cv:at time again cv:with you in detail talk)

I will speak to you again in detail about this matter when the time comes/in due course.

临 lín: at the point of, on the verge of:

他临危不惧。

tā línwēi bù jù

(lit. he cv:at the point of danger not afraid) He faced danger without fear.

我临行匆忙，来不及向您告别。

wǒ línxíng cōngmáng | láibují xiàng nín gàobié

(lit. I cv:at the point of leaving in a hurry, no time cv:to you (polite) say good-bye)

I was very busy before departing and didn't have time to say goodbye to you [polite].

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
到 dào		neut.	...止 zhǐ	n, v, cl	直到 zhídào	pre-/post-vb
至 zhì		fml.	...为止 wéi zhǐ	n, v, cl	直至 zhízhì	pre-/post-vb
迄 qì		class.	今 jīn 'today'	n		pre-vb
届 jiè		class.	时 shí 'time'	n		pre-vb
临 lín		colloq.	时 shí 'provisionally' 急 jí 'in haste' 危 wēi 'in danger' 死 sǐ 'die' 行 xíng 'travel'	n, adj, v		pre-vb

11.2.2.4 At the most opportune moment

趁 chèn: taking opportunity of, while:

趁热打铁。chèn rè dǎtiě

(lit. cv:while hot strike iron) Strike while the iron is hot.

孩子趁妈妈不在家的时候出去玩儿。

háizi chèn māma bù zài jiā de shíhou chūqu wánr

(lit. child cv:while mother not at home **de** time out-go play)

The child went out to play while his/her mother was not at home.

乘 **chéng**: taking advantage of, while:

右锋乘对方防守不严时射入一球。

yòufēng chéng duìfāng fángshǒu bù yán shí shè rù yī qiú

(lit. right-wing forward cv:taking advantage of opponent defence not tight time shoot-enter one ball)

The right-wing forward took advantage of the slack defence of the opposition to score a goal.

就 **jiù**: fitting in with [convenience]:

这本书，请你就便捎给他。

zhèi běn shū | qǐng nǐ jiùbiàn shāo gěi tā

(lit. this mw book, please you cv:fitting in with convenience take cv:giving to him)

Please will you take this book to him while you are about it.

顺 **shùn**: following, along with:

请你顺手把门关上。 **qǐng nǐ shùnshǒu bǎ mén guān shàng**

(lit. please you cv:along with hand cv:grasp door close up)

Would you please as you go out/as you come in/on your way shut the door.

随 **suí**: along with:

你随时可以跟我联系。 **nǐ suíshí kěyǐ gēn wǒ liánxì**

(lit. you cv: along with time may cv:with me contact)

You can get in touch with me any time.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
趁 chèn		neut.	机 jī 'opportunity' 便 biàn 'covenience' 势 shì 'situation'	n, adj, v, cl		pre-vb
乘 chéng		fml.	机 jī , 便 biàn	n		pre-vb
就 jiù		fml.	便 biàn	n		pre-vb
顺 shùn		colloq.	便 biàn , 势 shì , 手 shǒu 'hand'	n		pre-vb
随 suí		colloq.	时 shí 'time' 便 biàn , 机 jī , 手 shǒu	n		pre-vb

11.2.2.5 Whenever something happens

当 dāng: when:

当他回家度假时，我去探望他。
dāng tā huíjiā dùjià shí | wǒ qù tànwàng tā
(lit. cv:when he come home have holiday time, I go visit him)
When he comes home on holiday, I'll go to visit him.

逢 féng: whenever:

彩票逢星期六开奖。**cǎipiào féng xīngqī liù kāijiǎng**
(lit. lottery tickets cv:whenever Saturday draw lottery)
The lottery is drawn every Saturday.

遇 yù: when, whenever:

球赛遇雨顺延。**qiúsài yù yǔ shùn yán**
(lit. ball game cv:when rain postpone)
The match was postponed when it rained.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
当 dāng		neut.	...时 shí or ... 的时候 de shíhou	clause	每当 měidāng	pre-vb
逢 féng		neut.		n	每逢 měiféng	pre-vb
遇 yù		fml.		n	凡遇 fányú	pre-vb

11.2.2.6 As soon as possible

赶 gǎn: hurrying with:

我们赶快走吧。**wǒmen gǎnkuài zǒu ba**
(lit. we cv:hurrying with speed go **ba**) Let's go at once.

请你赶紧回去。**qǐng nǐ gǎnjǐn huíqu**
(lit. please you cv:hurrying with urgency return-go)
Please hurry back straight away.

尽 **jǐn**: as is possible:

请你尽早给我一个答复。

qǐng nǐ jǐnzǎo gěi wǒ yī ge dáfù

(lit. please you cv:as is possible early give me one mw reply)

Please let me have a reply as early as possible.

希望你能尽快回答我的问题。

xīwàng nǐ néng jǐnkuài huídá wǒde wèntí

(lit. hope you can cv:as is possible fast reply my question)

Hope you can reply to my question as quickly as possible.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
赶 gǎn		colloq.	快 kuài 'fast' 紧 jǐn 'tight'	adj		pre-vb
尽 jǐn		colloq.	快 kuài , 早 zǎo 'early'	n, adj		pre-vb

11.2.3 With, for or by someone or something

11.2.3.1 Together with

跟 **gēn**: with:

我跟你说话。 **wǒ gēn nǐ shuō jù huà**

(lit. I cv:with you speak mw words) I will have a word with you.

我想跟你们合作。 **wǒ xiǎng gēn nǐmen hézuò**

(lit. I like to cv:with you cooperate) I'd like to cooperate with you.

和 **hé**: with:

我可以和你当面谈谈吗？

wǒ kěyǐ hé nǐ dāngmiàn tántán ma

(lit. I may cv:with you cv:facing face talk-talk **ma**)

May I have a chat with you face to face?

与 **yǔ**: with:

他与她十分要好。 **tā yǔ tā shífēn yàohǎo**

(lit. he cv:with her extremely be on good terms)

He is a very close friend of hers.

他与此事无关。 **tā yǔ cǐshì wúguān**
(lit. he cv:with this matter without connection)
He has nothing to do with this (matter).

同 **tóng**: with:

他同她根本合不来。 **tā tóng tā gēnběn hébulái**
(lit. he cv:with her basically match-not-come)
He really doesn't get on with her.

我同小李住在一起。 **wǒ tóng xiǎolǐ zhù zài yīqǐ**
(lit. I cv:with Little Li live cv:at the same place) I live with Little Li.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
跟 gēn		northern colloq.		n, pron		pre-vb
和 hé		neut.		n, pron		pre-vb
与 yǔ		class.		n, pron		pre-vb
同 tóng		southern colloq.		n, pron		pre-vb

11.2.3.2 For (somebody) — beneficiary

给 **gěi**: for, to:

我给哥哥写了一封回信。
wǒ gěi gēge xiě le yī fēng huíxìn
(lit. I cv:to elder brother write **le** one mw reply letter)
I wrote a reply to elder brother.

快给他赔个不是。 **kuài gěi tā péi ge bùshi**
(lit. quickly cv:to him compensate mw not right)
Apologise to him immediately.

你能给我们当翻译吗?
nǐ néng gěi wǒmen dāng fānyì ma
(lit. you can cv:for us act as interpreter **ma**)
Can you be our interpreter?

替 **tì**: for:

大家都来替她送行。 **dàjiā dōu lái tì tā sòngxíng**
(lit. everyone all come cv:for her see-on-way)
Everyone came to see her off.

人人都替你高兴。

rénrén dōu tì nǐ gāoxìng

(lit. everyone all cv:for you happy) Everyone is happy for you.

同 **tóng**: for:

我同你出个主意。

wǒ tóng nǐ chū ge zhǔyi

(lit. I cv:for you come-up-with mw idea)

I'll think up an idea for you.

你去买票，行李我同你看管。

nǐ qù mǎi piào | xíngli wǒ tóng nǐ kānguǎn

(lit. you go buy tickets, luggage I cv:for you look after)

You go and buy the tickets, and I will keep an eye on the luggage for you.

为 **wèi**: for:

让我们为客人们的健康干杯！

ràng wǒmen wèi kèrénmen de jiànkāng gānbēi

(lit. let us cv:for guests **de** health dry glass)

Let's drink a toast to our guests./Let's drink to the health of our guests.

请为我向主人表示谢意。

qǐng wèi wǒ xiàng zhǔrén biǎoshì xièyì

(lit. please cv:for me cv:to host express thanks)

Please say thank you to the host for me.

别为这件小事担心。

bié wèi zhèi jiàn xiǎoshì dānxīn

(lit. don't cv:for this mw small matter carry worries)

Please don't worry about this small matter.

他为我送来了一份请帖。

tā wèi wǒ sònglai le yī fèn qǐngtiě

(lit. he cv:for me send-come **le** one mw invitation letter)

He sent me an invitation.

为安全起见，请勿在机舱使用手提电话。

wèi ānquán qǐjiàn | qǐng wù zài jīcāng shǐyòng shǒutí diànhuà

(lit. cv:for safety sake, please don't cv:in cabin use hand-carry telephones)

For safety reasons, please don't use mobile phones in the cabin.

为了 **wèile**: for sake of, in order to:

为了向顾客提供方便，商店决定周末开门营业。
wèile xiàng gùkè tígōng fāngbiàn | shāngdiàn juéding zhōumò kāimén yíngyè

(lit. cv:for sake of cv:to customers provide convenience, store decide weekend open door do business)

For the convenience of customers, the store decided to open for business at the weekends.

为了维护球场的秩序，警方派出了不少警察。
wèile wéihù qiúchǎng de zhìxù | jǐngfāng pàichū le bùshǎo jǐngchá
(lit. in order to maintain football-ground **de** order, police-side send out not a few policemen)

To preserve order at the football ground, the police deployed a considerable number of officers.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
给 gěi		colloq.		n, pron		pre-vb
替 tì		neut.		n, pron		pre-vb
同 tóng		dial.		pron		pre-vb
为 wèi		neut.	...起见 qǐjiàn	n, pron, adj	为了 wèile	pre-vb
为了 wèile	always as a sentence beginner	fml.	...起见 qǐjiàn	n, pron, adj, vb, cl		pre-vb

11.2.3.3 *By – be the responsibility of (somebody)*

由 **yóu**: by:

这件事由我负责。**zhè jiàn shì yóu wǒ fùzé**
(lit. this mw matter cv:by me take responsibility)
This matter is my responsibility.

归 **guī**: by, up to:

这些事全部归你管。
zhèxiē shì quánbù guī nǐ guǎn
(lit. these mw matters entirely cv:up to you take charge)
You are in charge of all these matters.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
由 yóu		fml.		n, pron		pre-vb
归 guī		colloq.		n, pron		pre-vb

11.2.4 Instrument and vehicle

11.2.4.1 With (a certain instrument or appliance)

用 **yòng**: with, using:

她用梳子梳了梳头发。

tā yòng shūzi shū le shū tóufa

(lit. she cv:with comb comb **le** comb hair) She combed her hair.

他用手掠了一下额前的头发。

tā yòng shǒu lüè le yīxià é qián de tóufa

(lit. he cv:with hand brush aside **le** one mw:time forehead in front **de** hair)

He brushed the hair from his forehead with his hand.

我用胳膊碰了他一下。

wǒ yòng gēbo pèng le tā yīxià

(lit. I cv:with arm nudge **le** him one mw:time)

I nudged him with my arm.

你用什么理由来说服她呢?

nǐ yòng shénme lǐyóu lái shuōfú tā ne

(lit. you cv:using what reason come convince her **ne**)

What reason did you use to convince her (then)?

拿 **ná**: with, taking:

我们拿把尺子量一量。

wǒmen ná bǎ chǐzi liǎng yī liǎng

(lit. we cv:with mw ruler measure one measure)

Let's measure it with a ruler.

请你拿几句话概括一下。

qǐng nǐ ná jǐ jù huà gàikuò yīxià

(lit. please you cv:with few mw words summarise one mw:time)

Please would you give a summary in a few words.

你帮了我这么多的忙。我拿什么谢你呢？
nǐ bāng le wǒ zhème duō de máng | wǒ ná shénme xiè nǐ ne
(lit. you help **le** me so much **de** help. I cv:with what thank you **ne**)
You've helped me so much. How can I thank you?

你拿什么做标准来衡量呢？
nǐ ná shénme zuò biāozhǔn lái héngliáng ne
(lit. you cv:with what make criterion come judge **ne**)
What criteria do you adopt to make a judgement?

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
用 yòng		neut.	concrete or abstract objects	n, pron		pre-vb
拿 ná		colloq.	concrete or abstract objects	n, pron		pre-vb

11.2.4.2 By (a vehicle)

坐 **zuò**: by:
我们打算坐船去。 **wǒmen dǎsuàn zuò chuán qù**
(lit. we intend cv:by boat go) We intend to go by boat.

乘 **chéng**: by:
你们乘哪一班飞机来？
nǐmen chéng nǎ/něi yī bān fēijī lái
(lit. you (plural) cv:by which one mw plane come)
Which flight will you come on?

搭 **dā**: by:
他们搭末班车回家。 **tāmen dā mòbānchē huíjiā**
(lit. they cv:by last mw bus/train return home)
They went home on the last bus/train.

coverb	usage	registeral	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
坐 zuò		colloq.		n		pre-vb
乘 chéng		fml.		n		pre-vb
搭 dā		neut.		n		pre-vb

11.2.5 By means of, in accordance with, etc.

11.2.5.1 Relying on (a person, etc.)

靠 **kào**: relying on:

他家里靠他挣钱过活。 **tā jiā li kào tā zhèngqián guòhuó**

(lit. his home-in cv:relying on him earn money pass life)

His family relied on his earnings.

仗 **zhàng**: relying on:

这件事全仗大家帮忙。 **zhèi jiàn shì quán zhàng dàjiā bāngmáng**

(lit. this mw matter entirely cv:relying on everyone help)

This matter is entirely reliant on everyone's help.

别仗势欺人。 **bié zhàng shì qī rén**

(lit. don't cv:relying on power bully people)

Don't rely on your power to bully people.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
靠 kào		neut.		n, pron		pre-vb
仗 zhàng		class.	势 shì 'power'	n, pron		pre-vb

11.2.5.2 By means of

凭 **píng**: by means of

凭票入场。 **píng piào rùchǎng**

(lit. cv:by ticket enter stadium/theatre) Admission by ticket only.

人类凭借语言互相交流思想。

rénlèi píngjiè yǔyán hùxiāng jiāoliú sīxiǎng

(lit. mankind cv:relying on language mutually exchange thinking)

Mankind exchanges ideas by means of language.

借 **jiè**: taking advantage of:

我想借此机会向大家表示感谢。

wǒ xiǎng jiè cǐ jīhuì xiàng dàjiā biǎoshì gǎnxiè

(lit. I want cv:taking advantage of this opportunity cv:towards everyone express thanks)

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone.

他藉着⁹朋友的帮助顺利地回到了家乡。
tā jièzhe péngyou de bāngzhù shùnlì de huídào le jiāxiāng
(he cv:taking advantage of friends' **de** help successfully **de** return to
le hometown)
With the help of friends he successfully made it back to his home town.

通过 **tōngguò**: by means of, through:

爱迪生通过各种试验终于发明了电灯。
àidíshēng tōngguò gèzhǒng shìyàn zhōngyú fāmíng le diàndēng
(lit. Edison cv:through every mw:kind experiment in the end invent **le**
electric light)
Edison finally invented the electric light after all kinds of experiments.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
凭 píng		neut.	票 piào 'ticket'	n	凭借 píngjiè	pre-vb
借 jiè		fml.	机会 jīhuì 'opportunity'	n	藉着 jièzhe	pre-vb
通过 tōngguò		fml.		n		pre-vb

⁹ 藉着 **jièzhe** is in fact a more commonly used written form than 借着 **jièzhe**.

11.2.5.3 According to

凭 **píng**: according to:

你凭什么得出这样的结论?
nǐ píng shénme déchū zhèyàng de jiélùn
(lit. you cv:according to what reach this kind **de** conclusion)
How did you reach a conclusion like this?

照 **zhào**: according to:

咱们就照这样办吧。**zánmen jiù zhào zhèyàng bàn ba**
(lit. we then cv:according to this way do **ba**)
Let's do it like this then.

按 **àn**: according to:

请按次序发言。**qǐng àn cìxù fāyán**
(lit. please cv:according to order speak) Please speak in order.

请按时把作业交上来。 **qǐng ànshí bǎ zuòyè jiāo shànglai**
(lit. please cv:according to time cv:grasp assignment hand over-come)
Please hand in your assignment on time.

请大家按照原来的规定去做。

qǐng dàjiā ànzhào yuánlái de guīdìng qù zuò
(lit. please everyone cv:according to original **de** stipulation go-do)
Would everyone please do it/act as originally stipulated.

依 yī: according to:

依我看，问题并不复杂。 **yī wǒ kàn | wéntí bìng bù fùzá**
(lit. cv:as I see, problem certainly not complicated)
As I see it, the problem certainly isn't complicated.

请依照情况而定。¹⁰ **qǐng yīzhào qíngkuàng ér dìng**
(lit. please cv:according to circumstances and decide)
Please decide in the light of circumstances.

请大家依次就座！ **qǐng dàjiā yī cì jiùzuò**
(lit. please everyone cv:according to order occupy seat)
Would everyone please sit in proper order.

¹⁰ In somewhat more formal statements 而 ér 'and (under these circumstances)' is placed between the coverb expression and the verb. This is likely to happen particularly if the verb is monosyllabic.

本着 běnzhe: in line with:

我们应该本着互助的精神办事。
wǒmen yīnggāi běnzhe hùzhù de jīngshén bànshì
(lit. we ought to cv:in line with mutual help **de** spirit do things)
We must work in the spirit of mutual assistance.

以 yǐ: according to, by means of:

你可以以此类推。 **nǐ kěyǐ yǐ cǐ lèituī**
(lit. you can cv:by this draw analogy) You can draw analogies from this.

你得以理服人。 **nǐ děi yǐ lǐ fú rén**
(lit. you must cv:by means of reason convince people)
You must convince people by reason.

我以个人的名义向您保证。
wǒ yǐ gèrén de míngyì xiàng nín bǎozhèng
(lit. I cv:according to individual name cv:towards you (polite) guarantee)
I give you my personal guarantee.

我以老朋友的身份劝你别这样做。

wǒ yǐ lǎo péngyou de shēnfèn quàn nǐ bié zhèyàng zuò

(lit. I cv:according to old friend's **de** capacity urge you don't this way do)
I urge you as an old friend not to do this.

平均每户以四口人计算。

píngjūn měi hù yǐ sì kǒu rén jìsuàn

(lit. average every household cv:according to four mw people calculate)
The average household is calculated as four people.

以 yǐ is often used in conjunction with 为 wéi followed by an adjective:

希望你以友谊为重。 **xīwàng nǐ yǐ yǒuyì wéi zhòng**

(lit. hope you cv:taking friendship consider weighty)
Hope you take friendship seriously

南方人以吃大米为主。

nánfāng rén yǐ chī dànmǐ wéi zhǔ

(lit. south area people cv:taking eat white rice consider main)
Southern people take white rice as their main food.

以此为凭。 **yǐ cǐ wéi píng**

(lit. cv:taking this consider proof)
Take this as proof.

就 jiù: according to:

就我来说，还是不去好。

jiù wǒ lái shuō | háishi bù qù hǎo

(lit. cv:according to I come-say, still not go good)
In my view it is best not to go.

据 jù: according to:

据我推测，他是不会同意的。

jù wǒ tuīcè | tā shì bùhuì tóngyi de

(lit. cv:according to I guess, he is not likely agree **de**)
My guess is he won't agree.

根据气象台的预报，明天要下雨。

gēnjù qìxiàngtái de yùbào | míngtiān yào xià yǔ

(lit. cv:according to weather station **de** forecast, tomorrow will rain)
According to the weather forecast, it will rain tomorrow.

据说，他已经出国去了。 **jùshuō | tā yǐjīng chūguó qù le**

(lit. cv:according to say, he already exit country go **le**)
They say he has already left the country.

准 **zhǔn**: according to:

咱们准前例办吧。 **zánmen zhǔn qiánlì bàn ba**

(lit. we cv:according to precedent do **ba**) Let's act according to precedent.

如 **rú**: according to:

请如期完成。 **qǐng rúqī wánchéng**

(lit. please cv:according to schedule complete) Please finish on time.

在此如数归还，请查收。 **zài cǐ rúshù guīhuán | qǐng cháchōu**

(lit. herewith cv:according to original numbers return, please check accept)

Please find the original amount returned herewith.

遵循 **zūnxún**: according to:

这类事情可以遵循常规解决。

zhèi lèi shìqíng kěyǐ zūnxún chángguī jiějué

(lit. this mw:kind matter can cv:according to common practice resolve)

This matter can be resolved routinely.

基于 **jīyú**: on the basis of:

基于以上的理由，我不赞成你的意见。

jīyú yǐshàng de lǐyóu | wǒ bù zànchéng nǐ de yìjiàn

(lit. cv:on the basis of the above **de** reasons, I not agree your opinion)

For the reasons above, I do not agree with your opinion.

由于 **yóuyú**: owing to:

由于种种原因，他无法出席这次会议。

yóuyú zhǒngzhǒng yuányīn | tā wúfǎ chūxí zhèi cì huìyì

(cv:owing to all kind of reasons, he no way attend this mw:occasion meeting) For various reasons, he cannot attend this meeting.

由于工作关系，我未能离开。

yóuyú gōngzuò guānxì | wǒ wèi néng líkāi

(lit. cv:owing to work reasons, I not able leave)

I could not leave because of work [commitments].

出于 **chūyú**: stemming from:

出于好奇，他极力想弄清事实的真相。

chūyú hàoqí | tā jílì xiǎng nòngqīng shìshí de zhēnxiàng

(lit. cv:stemming from curiosity, he extreme strength want make clear facts **de** truth)

Out of curiosity, he was intent on getting to the truth of the situation/the real facts.

针对 **zhēnduì**: in the light of:

请你针对具体情况作出决定吧。

qǐng nǐ zhēnduì jùtǐ qíngkuàng zuòchū juédìng ba

(lit. please you cv:in the light of concrete circumstances make out
decision **ba**)

Please come to a decision in the light of concrete conditions.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
凭 píng		colloq.		n		pre-vb
照 zhào		colloq.		n		pre-vb
按 àn		neut.		n	按照 ànzào	pre-vb
依 yī		neut.		n	依照 yīzhào	pre-vb
本着 běnzhe		neut.	精神 jīngshén 'spirit' 原则 yuánzé 'principle'	n		pre-vb
以 yǐ		class.		n		pre-vb
就 jiù		class.		n, cl		pre-vb
据 jù	usually as a sentence beginner	fml. fml. class.		n, v n n	根据 gēnjù	pre-vb pre-vb pre-vb
准 zhǔn		fml.		n		pre-vb
如 rú		fml.		n		pre-vb
遵循 zūnxún		fml.	期 qī deadline' 数 shù 'amount'	n	遵照 zūnzhào	pre-vb
基于 jīyú	usually as a sentence beginner	fml.		n		pre-vb
由于 yóuyú	usually as a sentence beginner	fml.		n		pre-vb
出于 chūyú	usually as a sentence beginner	fml.		n		pre-vb
针对 zhēnduì		fml.		n		pre-vb

于 yú: regarding:

抽烟于健康有害。

chōuyān yú jiànkāng yǒu hài

(lit. smoking cv:regarding health harmful)

Smoking is harmful to health.

这样于你自己不利。

zhèyàng yú nǐ zìjǐ bùlì

(lit. this way cv:regarding you self not beneficial)

This is no good to you personally.

至于 zhìyú: as regards:

至于其他问题，以后再说。

zhìyú qítā wèntí | yǐhòu zài shuō

(lit. cv:as regards other questions, later again speak)

We will talk again about the other questions later.

关于 guānyú: concerning:

关于这件事，我没有意见。

guānyú zhèi jiàn shì | wǒ méiyǒu yìjiàn

(lit. cv:concerning this mw matter, I not have opinion)

I don't have an opinion on this matter.

关于这个问题，后面还要详述。

guānyú zhèi ge wèntí | hòumian hái yào xiángshù

(lit. cv:concerning this mw question, afterwards still need detail account)

As regards this question, [I] will go into greater details later on.

讲 jiǎng: speaking of:

讲条件，他没有你好。

jiǎng tiáojiàn | tā méiyǒu nǐ hǎo

(lit. cv:speaking of qualification, he not have you good)

Speaking of qualifications, he is not as good as you.

论 lùn: as regards:

论能力，他比你强。lùn nénglì | tā bǐ nǐ qiáng

(lit. as regards ability, he cv:compared with you strong)

As regards ability, he is better than you.

论打壁球，他数第一。 **lùn dǎ bìqiú | tā shǔ dìyī**
(lit. as regards playing squash, he rank no. 1)
He is ranked number one in squash.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
于 yú		fml.		n		pre-vb
至于 zhìyú	usually as a sentence beginner	neut.	问题 wèntí problem	n		pre-vb
关于 guānyú	usually as a sentence beginner	neut.		n		pre-vb
讲 jiǎng	usually as a sentence beginner	colloq.		n, cl		pre-vb
论 lùn	usually as a sentence beginner	colloq.		n, vb, cl		pre-vb

12.2.5.5 Besides, except

除 **chú**: besides, apart from:

除持票者以外，谁也不准入场。
chú chípiàozhě yǐwài | shuí yě bùzhǔn rùchǎng
(lit. cv:apart from ticket-holder apart, anyone also not allow enter
stadium/hall)

No one is allowed in apart from ticket-holders.

她除了家务之外，什么都不会做。
tā chule jiāwù zhīwài | shénme dōu bùhuì zuò
(lit. she cv:apart from household duties part, anything all not can do)
She can't do anything but housework.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
除 chú		neut.	...以外 yǐwài ...之外 zhīwài	n, pron, adj, vb, cl	除了 chúle 除开 chūkāi	pre-vb

11.2.5.6 Considering as

为 **wéi**: considering as:

他把这一切都视为自己的责任。

tā bǎ zhèi yīqiè dōu shì wéi zìjǐ de zérèn

(lit. he cv:grasping this everything all look upon cv:as own responsibility)

He considers all this his own responsibility.

作 **zuò**: considering as:

可别把这件事当作儿戏! **kě bié bǎ zhèi jiàn shì dāngzuò érxi**

(lit. really don't cv:grasping this mw matter regard cv:as children's game)

Mind you don't treat this matter as something trifling.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
为 wéi	always as complement	class.	视 shì ... 为 wéi	n		post-vb
作 zuò	always as complement	colloq.	当 dàng ... 作 zuò	n		post-vb

11.2.6 Grammatical operators

11.2.6.1 Manipulative

把 **bǎ**: grasping:¹¹

不要把事情弄糟了。 **bùyào bǎ shìqíng nòngzāo le**

(lit. don't cv:grasping matter make mess **le**)

Don't mess the business up.

快把药吃了。 **kuài bǎ yào chī le**

(lit. quick cv:grasping medicine eat **le**) Hurry up and take the medicine.

¹¹ See [Chapter 12](#) for a full discussion of the 把 **bǎ** construction.

将 **jiāng**: grasping:

先将他请来。 **xiān jiāng tā qǐng lái**

(lit. first cv:grasping him invite-come) Invite him here first.

拿 **ná**: taking:

别拿我开玩笑。 **bié ná wǒ kāi wánxiào**

(lit. don't cv:taking me make joke) Don't make fun of me.

谁都拿他没办法。 **shuí dōu ná tā méi bànǎ**
(lit. anyone all cv:taking him have no way)
No one can do anything with him.

管 **guǎn**: taking:

民间管月蚀叫天狗吃月亮。
mínjiān guǎn yuèshí jiào tiāngǒu chī yuèliang
(lit. people-among cv:taking lunar eclipse call heavenly hound eating the moon)
According to folklore, a lunar eclipse is known as the Heavenly Hound Eating the Moon.

你管这个叫什么? **nǐ guǎn zhèi ge jiào shénme**
(lit. you cv:taking this call what) What do you call this?

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
把 bǎ		neut.		n, pron		pre-vb
将 jiāng		fml.		n, pron		pre-vb
拿 ná		colloq.		n, pron		pre-vb
管 guǎn		colloq.	... 叫 jiào	n, pron		pre-vb

11.2.6.2 Passive

被 **bèi**: by:

那个拳击手被他的对手打败了。
nèi ge quánjīshǒu bèi tāde duìshǒu dǎbài le
(lit. that mw boxer cv:by his opponent defeat **le**)
That boxer was beaten by his opponent.

叫 **jiào**: by:

谜语叫她(给)猜着了。 **míyǔ jiào tā (gěi) cāizháo le**
(lit. riddle cv:by her **gei** guess-right **le**) The riddle was guessed by her.

让 **ràng**: by:

行李让雨(给)淋湿了。 **xínglǐ ràng yǔ (gěi) lín shī le**
(lit. luggage cv:by rain **gei** sprinkle wet **le**)
The luggage was soaked by the rain.

给 **gěi**: by:

车库的门给小偷撬开了。 **chēkù de mén gěi xiǎotōu qiàokāi le**
(lit. garage **de** door cv:by petty thief prise open **le**)
The garage door was prised open by a thief.

为 *wéi*: by:

他从来不为别人所左右。

tā cónglái bù wéi biérén suǒ zuǒyòu

(lit. he all along not cv:by other people *suǒ* control)

He was never controlled by other people.

他为大家所尊敬。 **tā wéi dàjiā suǒ zūnjìng**

(lit. he cv:by everyone *suǒ* respect)

He is respected by everyone.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
被 <i>bèi</i>		fml.		n, pron		pre-vb
叫 <i>jiào</i>		colloq.	... 给 <i>gěi</i> (optional)	n, pron		pre-vb
让 <i>ràng</i>		infml.	... 给 <i>gěi</i> (optional)	n, pron		pre-vb
给 <i>gěi</i>		colloq.		n, pron		pre-vb
为 <i>wéi</i>		class.	... 所 <i>suǒ</i>	n, pron		pre-vb

11.2.6.3 Comparison

Note that comparative coverbs are more often followed by adjectival phrases rather than by verbal phrases.

象 *xiàng*: similar to:

她象她妈妈一样固执。

tā xiàng tā māma yīyàng gùzhí

(lit. she cv:similar to her mother the same stubborn)

She is as stubborn as her mother.

她象她爸爸一样不喜欢吃鱼。

tā xiàng tā bàba yīyàng bù xǐhuan chī yú

(lit. she cv:similar to her father the same not like eat fish)

Like her father, she does not like eating fish.

如 *rú*: like:

那儿的夏天如冬天一般寒冷。

nàr de xiàtiān rú dōngtiān yībān hánlěng

(lit. there *de* summer cv:like winter the same cold)

Summer there is as cold as winter.

跟 gēn: compared with:

这个学期的功课跟上学期一样多。
zhèi ge xuéqī de gōngkè gēn shàng xuéqī yīyàng duō
(lit. this mw term **de** coursework cv:compared with last term the same much)
The coursework this term/semester is just as much as last term/semester.

比 bǐ: compared with:

这门课比那门容易。**zhèi mén kè bǐ nài mén róngyì**
(lit. this mw discipline/course cv:compared with that mw easy)
This course/discipline is easier than that one.

较 jiào: compared with:

今年的成绩较去年为好。
jīnnián de chéngjì jiào qùnián wéi hǎo
(lit. this year **de** results cv:compared with last year be better)
This year's results are better than last year's.

于 yú: than:

地球大于月亮。**dìqiú dà yú yuèliang**
(lit. earth big cv:than moon) The earth is bigger than the moon.
健康的体魄贵于任何财富。
jiànkāng de tǐpò guì yú rènhe cáifù
(lit. healthy **de** physique valuable cv:than any wealth)
A healthy body is worth more than riches.

coverb	usage	register	collocational	governmental	prosodic	sequential
象 xiàng	resemblance	neut.	...一样 yīyàng	n, adj, vb, cl	好象 hǎoxiàng	pre-vb
如 rú	resemblance	fml.	...(一)般 (yī)bān	n, adj, vb, cl	犹如 yóurú	pre-vb
跟 gēn ¹²	resemblance	infrm.	...一样 yīyàng	n, adj, vb, cl		pre-vb
比 bǐ	comparison	neut.		n, adj, vb, cl		pre-vb
较 jiào	comparison	fml.	...为 wéi	n, adj, vb, cl		pre-vb
于 yú	comparison, always as a complement	fml.				

¹² In this context, 跟 gēn may be used interchangeably with 和 hé, 与 yǔ, 同 tóng.

11.3 Coverbal positions

As we have seen above, coverbs can be positioned pre-verbally or post-verbally. A pre-verbal position indicates that the coverbal phrase is being used as an adverbial specifying the background in which the action encoded in the main verb takes place, e.g. location, time, direction taken, instrument used, means employed, principle followed, person involved, and so on. These preliminaries or conditions must first be established before the action can be carried out, and the coverbal phrase is therefore placed before the main verb to give it precedence. The pre-verbal coverbal phrase is in fact primarily concerned with the starting position of the subject. For example:

他在图书馆学习。 **tā zài túshūguǎn xuéxí**
(lit. he cv:in library study) He is studying in the library.

*他学习在图书馆。 **tā xuéxí zài túshūguǎn**
*(lit. he study cv:in library)

Here the subject has to locate himself ‘in the library’ before he ‘can begin to study’.¹³

However, there are situations where the actions in the main verb must be carried out first before a particular location or point of time is reached. For example, the verb 放 **fàng** ‘to put’ and the verb 走 **zǒu** ‘to walk’ naturally lead to new locations or destinations. At a more abstract level, a meeting may be scheduled at a particular time or something may be regarded in a different light. All these actions of putting, walking, scheduling or regarding must all happen before the new location, time, etc. is reached, and it is therefore logical for the coverbal phrases to come after the main verbs as complements.¹⁴ These post-verbal coverbal phrases are, in most cases, concerned with the end or final position of the object. For example,

¹³ This precedence rule must be followed in the prose grammar of present-day Chinese, which differs from Classical Chinese, where such precedence rules were not made, or from Chinese poetry, where precedence rules may be violated to give way to rhythm or euphony, e.g. 我们走在大路上。 **wǒmen zǒu zài dà lù shàng** ‘We are walking on a main road’ should, strictly speaking, be reworded as: 我们在大路上走着。 **wǒmen zài dà lù shàng zǒu zhe**.

¹⁴ It must be understood that the logic behind the precedence between the coverb and the main verb is a prominent feature of present-day Chinese. In Classical Chinese or in a more classical style, the precedence question discussed here is one more of usage than of meaning or logic.

他把衣服放在床上。 **tā bǎ yīfu fàng zài chuáng shàng**
(lit. he cv:grasping clothes put cv:on bed-top)
He put the clothes on the bed.

Here the location of the subject is not specified, but the important thing is that, as he puts down the clothes, they, the object of the sentence, end up on the bed.

Similarly, in the following example:

他游到对岸。 **tā yóu dào duì'àn**
(lit. he swim cv:reaching opposite shore)
He swam to the opposite shore.

It is obvious that he must start swimming before he can reach the opposite shore.

In some sentences, particularly those with intransitive verbs, a subject may locate itself in a place before the action and remain in the same place afterwards, so that the starting position and the end position of the subject coincide. As far as meaning is concerned, there is no difference between the pre-verbal and post-verbal position of the coverbal phrase in these cases. For example:

他在北京住。 **tā zài běijīng zhù**
(lit. he cv:in Beijing live)

他住在北京。 **tā zhù zài běijīng**
(lit. he live cv:in Beijing) He lives in Beijing.

蝴蝶在花丛中飞舞。 **húdié zài huācóng zhōng fēiwǔ**
(lit. butterflies cv:in flower-clusters middle fly-dance)

蝴蝶飞舞在花丛中。 **húdié fēiwǔ zài huācóng zhōng**
(lit. butterflies fly-dance cv:in flower-clusters middle)
The butterflies flew about among the flowers.

Elsewhere, context and common sense, too, in a meaning-oriented language like Chinese, will rule out any misunderstanding that might arise from pre-verbal or post-verbal positioning of a coverbal phrase. For instance:

他在黑板上写了几个字。
tā zài hēibǎn shàng xiě le jǐ ge zì
(lit. he cv:on blackboard write **le** a few mw characters)
He wrote a few Chinese characters on the blackboard.

means very much the same as the following sentence, apart from the switch to definite reference for the object 字 *zì* 'characters':

他把那几个字写在黑板上。

tā bǎ nà jǐ ge zì xiě zài hēibǎn shàng

(lit. he cv:grasping those few mw characters write cv: on
blackboard-top)

He wrote those few Chinese characters on the blackboard.

In the first sentence, it will still be understood that the subject is standing in front of the blackboard writing Chinese characters on it, and no one of sound mind will think that subject has climbed onto the blackboard before writing.

Sometimes, when a coverbal phrase indicates time or location (particularly with a fairly long expression), scope, basis or purpose, it may come at the beginning of the sentence before the subject:

趁人不注意，他悄悄地离开了。

chèn rén bù zhùyì | tā qiāoqiāo de líkāi le

(lit. cv:taking advantage of people not paying attention, he quietly **de**
leave **le**)

He quietly left while people weren't paying attention.

在喜马拉雅山的山颠上，空气极其稀薄。

zài xīmǎlāyǎ shān de shāndiān shàng | kōngqì jíqí xībó

(lit. cv:on Himalaya mountains **de** summit-on, air extremely thin)

The air is extremely thin on the summit of Himalayan mountains.

对于这个问题，他们还没有作出答复。

duìyú zhèi ge wèntí | tāmen hái méiyǒu zuòchū dáfù

(lit. cv:regarding this mw question, they still not-have produce reply)

They still have not replied to this question.

关于青少年的品行问题，学校与家长都应该负责。

**guānyú qīngshàonián de pǐnxíng wèntí | xuéxiào yǔ jiāzhǎng
dōu yīnggāi fùzé**

(lit. cv:concerning young people teenager **de** behaviour question,
school and parents both must take responsibility of)

Schools and parents must both take responsibility for the behaviour
of young people and teenagers.

除了法语之外，她还学习汉语。

chúle fǎyǔ zhīwài | tā hái xuéxí hànyǔ

(lit. cv:besides French apart, she also study Chinese)

She is studying Chinese as well as French.

根据最近的研究，记忆的好坏跟年龄无关。

gēnjù zuìjìn de yánjiū | jìyì de hǎohuài gēn niánlíng wúguān

(lit. cv:according to latest **de** research, memory **de** good-bad cv:with age no connection)

According to the latest research, quality of memory/whether memory is good or bad has no relation to age.

为了大家，她宁可牺牲自己的利益。

wèile dàjiā | tā nìngkě xīshēng zìjǐ de lìyì

(lit. cv:for the sake of everyone, she would rather sacrifice own **de** interest) For everyone's sake, she would rather sacrifice her own interests.

把 *bǎ* constructions

A 把 *bǎ* construction is a syntactic feature unique to the Chinese language. It is a device that uses the coverb 把 *bǎ* ‘to grasp’¹ to move a definite-referenced object to a position before the main verb. This leaves the space after the verb available to elements other than the object, e.g. for a consequential complement to indicate the result inflicted upon the object through the action contained in the verb. This repositioning manoeuvre arises from the fact that Chinese sentences find it possible, only in very few instances,² to hold an object and an additional element together in a position after the same verb, particularly if the additional element is three or more syllables long. Given its association with an action verb, the 把 *bǎ* construction is a regular feature of a narrative sentence.

¹ See §11.2.6.

² See §11.1.

12.1 The structural features of a 把 *bǎ* construction

A 把 *bǎ* construction must have the following three structural features:

- (a) the object of the coverb 把 *bǎ* must be of definite reference;
- (b) the main verb of the sentence must be followed by a complement³ or, less commonly, by a second noun;
- (c) the main verb must be an action verb.

³ Sometimes, just 了 *le* itself with its underlying notion of 了 *liǎo* ‘to finish’.

If any one of the three conditions is not fulfilled, the construction is not acceptable, as in the following:

*他把一个电视机弄坏了。 **tā bǎ yī ge diànshìjī nòng huài le*

*He broke a television set.

in which the object of 把 **bǎ** is of indefinite reference;

*他把那个电视机送。***tā bǎ nèi ge diànshìjī sòng**

*He gave the television set.

in which the verb 送 **sòng** ‘to give as a present’ is not followed by either of the elements listed under (b) above;

*他把这件事知道了。***tā bǎ zhèi jiàn shì zhīdao le**

*He came to know this matter.

in which the verb 知道 **zhīdao** ‘to know’ is an involuntary cognitive verb, not an action verb.

12.1.1 *Definite-referenced object*

Since the definite reference of the object of the coverb 把 **bǎ** is a requirement of the construction, the object does not need to be specifically marked for definiteness. That is to say, an unmarked noun without any demonstrative adjective will be assumed to be definite:

她自己把药吃了。 **tā zìjǐ bǎ yào chī le**

(lit. she self cv:grasping medicine eat **le**)

She took the medicine herself.

12.1.2 *The elements after the main verb*

The extra elements after the verb in a 把 **bǎ** construction may take the form of a complement or an object.

12.1.2.1 *Different forms of complement*

(a) resultative:

大夫把他的病治好了。 **dàifu bǎ tāde bìng zhì hǎo le**

(lit. doctor cv:grasping his illness cure-well **le**)

The doctor cured his illness.

你把我原来的意思讲走了。

nǐ bǎ wǒ yuánlái de yìsi jiǎng zǒu le

(lit. you cv:grasping my original meaning speak-away **le**)

You distorted/did not convey my original meaning.

(b) locational:

母亲把孩子搂在怀里。 **mǔqin bǎ háizi lǒu zài huái li**
(lit. mother cv:grasping child hold cv:in bosom-inside)
Mother took the child in her arms.

他把布告贴在最显眼的地方。
tā bǎ bùgào tiē zài zuì xiǎnyǎn de dìfang
(lit. he cv:grasping notice stick cv:on most eye-catching place)
He stuck the notice in the most eye-catching/conspicuous place.

(c) directional:

什么风把你刮来了? **shénme fēng bǎ nǐ guālai le**
(lit. what wind cv:grasping you blow-come **le**)
What wind has blown you here?

她把窗帘放了下来。 **tā bǎ chuānglián fàng le xiàlai**
(lit. she cv:grasping window blind let **le** down-come)
She pulled down the blind.

(d) dative:

他把信转交给她。
tā bǎ xìn zhuǎnjiāo gěi tā
(lit. he cv:grasping letter pass on cv:to her)
He passed on the letter to her.

奶奶把那些故事讲给孩子们听。⁴
nǎinai bǎ nèixiē gùshi jiǎng gěi háizimen tīng
(lit. grandma cv:grasping those stories tell cv:to children listen)
Grandma told those stories to the children.

⁴ Here, 给 **gěi** is the coverb in the complement and links with another verb 听 **tīng** 'to listen'.

(e) durational:

警察把小偷关了三天。
jǐngchá bǎ xiǎotōu guān le sān tiān
(lit. policemen cv:grasping petty thief lock up **le** three days)
The police locked up the petty thief for three days.

姐姐把黄豆浸了两个钟头。
jiějie bǎ huángdòu jìn le liǎng ge zhōngtóu
(lit. elder sister cv:grasping soybean soak **le** two mw hours)
Elder sister soaked the soybeans for two hours.

(f) brief durational:

他把那篇稿子修改了一下。

tā bǎ nài piān gǎozi xiūgǎi le yīxià

(lit. he cv:grasping that mw manuscript revise **le** one cv:occasion)

He made some revisions to the draft.

机场的服务员把他的行李称了称。

jīchǎng de fúwùyuán bǎ tāde xíngli chēng le chēng

(lit. airport **de** service people cv:grasping his luggage weigh **le** weigh)

The airport official weighed his baggage.

(g) frequency:

他把那几个生词默写了好几遍。

tā bǎ nà jǐ ge shēngcí mòxiě le hǎo jǐ biàn

(lit. he cv:grasping those few mw new words write-from-memory

le very a-few times)

He wrote the new vocabulary out from memory a good many times.

老师把那首唐诗朗读了三次。

lǎoshī bǎ nài shǒu tángshī lǎngsòng le sān cì

(lit. teacher cv:grasping that mw Tang poem recite **le** three times)

The teacher read out/recited that Tang poem three times.

(h) descriptive with 得 **de**:

她把房间收拾得干干净净。

tā bǎ fángjiān shōushi de gāngānjìngjìng

(lit. she cv:grasping room tidy **de** dry-dry-clean-clean)

She gave the room a thorough tidying.

他把书架上的书放得整整齐齐。

tā bǎ shūjià shàng de shū fàng de zhěngzhěngqíqí

(lit. he cv:grasping bookcase-top **de** books place **de**

whole-whole-flush-flush)

He placed/arranged the books neatly on the bookcase.

(i) evaluative with 得 **de**:

律师把问题解释得很清楚。

lǚshī bǎ wèntí jiěshì de hěn qīngchū

(lit. lawyer cv:grasping problem explain **de** very clear)

The lawyer explained the problem very clearly.

爸爸把道理说得十分详细。

bàba bǎ dào lǐ shuō de shí fēn xiáng xì

(lit. father cv:grasping reason say **de** very clear)

Father put the argument in great detail.

(j) judgemental with 成 **chéng**, etc.:

导演把整个戏剧处理成一个喜剧。

dǎo yǎn bǎ zhěng ge xì jù chǔ lǐ chéng yī ge xǐ jù

(lit. director cv:grasping whole mw play treat cv:as one mw comedy)

The director treated the whole play as a comedy.

他们把这件事儿视为无关紧要的事儿。

tā men bǎ zhè jiàn shì r shì wéi wú guān jǐn yào de shì r

(lit. they cv:grasping this mw matter look upon cv:as

not-concerning-importance **de** matter)

They viewed the business/affair as something of no importance.

老奶奶把小姑娘当作自己的女儿。

lǎo nǚ nai bǎ xiǎo gū niang dàn g zuò zì jǐ de nǚ ér

(lit. old granny cv:grasping little girl look upon cv:as her own **de** daughter)

The old lady looked upon the young girl as her own daughter.

12.1.2.2 A second object in the form of a noun or a number/measure word

妹妹把花浇了水了。

mèi mei bǎ huā jiāo le shuǐ le

(lit. younger sister cv:grasping flower sprinkle **le** water **le**)

Younger sister has watered the flowers.

妹妹把水浇了花了。

mèi mei bǎ shuǐ jiāo le huā le

(lit. younger sister cv:grasping water sprinkle **le** flower **le**)

Younger sister has used the water to water the flowers.

弟弟把蛋糕吃了一半。

dì dì bǎ dàn gāo chī le yī bàn

(lit. younger brother cv:grasping cake eat **le** a-half)

Younger brother ate half of the cake.

妈妈把蛋糕切了一块。

mā ma bǎ dàn gāo qiē le yī kuài

(lit. mother cv:grasping cake cut **le** one piece) Mother cut a slice of cake.

12.1.3 The main verb in a 把 *bǎ* construction

The main verb in a 把 *bǎ* construction, as we have said, must be an action verb, most commonly within a narrative sentence. Therefore, the non-action verbs, generally found in expository sentences, would not occur with 把 *bǎ*: 是 *shì* ‘to be’; 有 *yǒu* ‘to have’, verbs of emotion (喜欢 *xǐhuan* ‘to like’; 爱 *ài* ‘to love’, etc.) and most cognitive verbs (知道 *zhīdào* ‘to know’, 懂 *dǒng* ‘to understand’, etc.). However, a small number of cognitive verbs, which encode a mental exertion or process rather than result, may still be used with 把 *bǎ* sentences:

请把这件重要的事儿记住!

qǐng bǎ zhèi jiàn zhòngyào de shìr jìzhù

(lit. please cv:grasping this mw important *de* matter keep-in-mind firmly)

Please remember this important matter!

别把我的电话号码忘了。

bié bǎ wǒ de diànhuà hàomà wàng le

(lit. don’t cv:grasping my telephone number forget *le*)

Don’t forget my telephone number.

请你把这一点了解清楚。

qǐng nǐ bǎ zhèi yī diǎn liǎojiě qīngchu

(lit. please you cv:grasping this one point understand clear)

Please get a clear understanding of this point.

12.2 Intentionality in a 把 *bǎ* construction

Intentionality is an inherent implication underlying most 把 *bǎ* constructions, that is to say, a deliberate action is usually involved. However, there are contexts in which either the outcome of the action of the verb is unintentional or the question of intentionality simply does not arise:

他没照镜子，把帽子戴歪了。

tā méi zhào jìngzi | bǎ màozi dài wāi le

(lit. he did not look at the mirror, cv:grasping hat put-on not-straight *le*)

He didn’t look at the mirror and put his hat on crooked.

太阳把大地染红了。

tàiyáng bǎ dàdì rǎn hóng le

(lit. sun cv:grasping big-land dye red **le**)

The sun has painted the earth red.

潮水把沙滩上的衣服冲走了。

cháoshuǐ bǎ shātān shàng de yīfu chōng zǒu le

(lit. tide cv:grasping beach-on **de** clothes wash off **le**)

The tide washed away the clothes on the beach.

In other cases, the action may be deliberate or not depending on the context:

弟弟把花瓶打破了。

dìdì bǎ huāpíng dǎpò le

(lit. younger brother cv:grasping flower vase hit-broken **le**)

Younger brother broke the flower vase.

他把回信耽搁了。

tā bǎ huíxìn dāngē le

(lit. he cv:grasping reply-letter delay **le**)

He was late with his (letter of) reply.

老师点名的时候，把她的名字漏了。

lǎoshī diǎnmíng de shíhòu | bǎ tāde míngzi lòu le

(lit. teacher call roll **de** time, cv:grasping her name leave out **le**)

When the teacher took the register, he left out her name.

However, if 给 **gěi** is inserted between the 把 **bǎ** phrase and the verb, the implication will invariably be that the action is unintentional:

弟弟(一不小心)把花瓶给打破了。

dìdì (yī bù xiǎoxīn) bǎ huāpíng gěi dǎpò le

(lit. younger brother (one-not-careful) cv:grasping flower vase **gěi** hit broken **le**)

Younger brother broke the flower vase (in a moment of carelessness).

妹妹(无意中)把她那条漂亮的裙子给弄脏了。

mèimei (wúyì zhōng) bǎ tā nèi tiáo piàoliang de qúnzi gěi nòngzāng le

(lit. younger sister (have-no-intention-in) cv:grasping her that mw beautiful skirt **gěi** make-dirty **le**)

Younger sister (inadvertently) got that beautiful skirt of hers dirty.

12.3 把 *bǎ* constructions and imperatives

Given the emphasis on intention and specific action of the 把 *bǎ* construction, it is only natural that it is often used in imperatives, either to make requests or to give orders:

请你随手把门关上。

qǐng nǐ suíshǒu bǎ mén guān shàng

(lit. please you follow-hand cv:grasping door close-up)

Please close the door behind you.

请把窗户打开。

qǐng bǎ chuānghu dǎkāi

(lit. please cv:grasping window hit-open)

Please open the window.

快把瓶口封严。

kuài bǎ píngkǒu fēngyán

(lit. quick cv:grasping bottle-mouth seal tight)

Hurry up and seal (tight) the bottle.

火旺了，快把锅坐上。

huǒ wàng le | kuài bǎ guō zuò shàng

(lit. fire burn-bright *le*, quick cv:grasping pot sit-on)

The fire is roaring/burning up, hurry up and put the pot on.

请你把梨皮旋掉。

qǐng nǐ bǎ lípí xuàn diào

(lit. please you cv:grasping pear-skin peel off)

Please peel the pear.

请把盐递给我。

qǐng bǎ yán dì gěi wǒ

(lit. please cv:grasping salt pass cv:to me)

Please pass me the salt.

请大家把果皮扔在垃圾桶里。

qǐng dàjiā bǎ guǒpí rēng zài lājī tǒng lǐ

(lit. please everybody cv:grasping fruit-skin throw cv:in litter-bin-inside)

Would everyone please put their litter in the rubbish bins.

别把说明书取走！

bié bǎ shuōmíngshū qǔ zǒu

(lit. don't cv:grasping explaining-book take off *le*)

Don't go off with the synopsis/manual.

12.4 A particular feature of 把 *bǎ* constructions in evaluative sentences

When the 把 *bǎ* construction is used in an evaluative sentence following a modal verb, the necessity for the object of 把 *bǎ* to be of definite reference is removed:

你总不能把什么责任都推给我吧。

nǐ zǒng bù néng bǎ shénme zérèn dōu tuī gěi wǒ ba

(lit. you after-all not able cv:grasping whatever responsibility all push cv:to me *ba*)

You can't possibly push all the responsibilities on to me.

你可以把字写得更好一点儿吗？

nǐ kěyǐ bǎ zì xiě de hǎo yīdiǎnr ma

(lit. you can cv:grasping words write *de* a little better *ma*)

Could you write a bit better?

谁都应该把书放回原处。

shuí dōu yīnggāi bǎ shū fàng huí yuánchù

(lit. nobody all ought to cv:grasping book place-back original place)

Everyone ought to put books back where they came from.

别/不要⁵把什么罪名都加在我身上。

bié/bùyào bǎ shénme zuì míng dōu jiā zài wǒ shēnshàng

(lit. don't cv:grasping whatever crime-label all add cv:on my body-on)

Don't level all the charges against me.

⁵ 别 *bié* is the fused form of 不要 *bùyào* and is therefore considered to be the combination of a negator and a modal verb.

Admonitions or admonitory notices may likewise have indefinite-referenced objects after 把 *bǎ*:

不准把车辆停放在进出口！

bùzhǔn bǎ chēliàng tíngfàng zài jìnchūkǒu

(lit. not permit cv:grasping vehicles park-place cv:at enter-exit-opening)

Parking (vehicles/cars) at the entrance and exit is forbidden.

禁止把七岁以下的小孩带入会场！

jìnzhǐ bǎ qī suì yǐxià de xiǎohái dàirù huìchǎng

(lit. forbid cv:grasping seven year old below *de* child bring cv:into assembly hall)

It is not allowed to bring children under 7 into the assembly hall.

严禁把香烟售给十八岁以下的青少年。

yánjìn bǎ xiāngyān shòu gěi shíbā suì yǐxià de qīngshàonián
(lit. strictly forbid cv:grasping cigarettes sell cv:to 18 year below **de**
youths and teenagers)

It is strictly forbidden to sell cigarettes to young people under 18.

怎么可以把垃圾扔在这儿呢？

zénme kěyǐ bǎ lājī rēng zài zhèr ne
(lit. how can cv:grasping rubbish throw cv:at here **ne**)
How can rubbish be dumped here?

Note, however, that these indefinite-referenced nouns, being unmarked, are of a generic nature. They are to be distinguished from indefinite-referenced noun phrases preceded by ‘numeral + measure’ attributives.

12.5 把 **bǎ** constructions in immediate contexts and narratives

把 **bǎ** constructions referring directly to immediate contexts can include indefinite-referenced noun phrases together with ‘numeral + measure’ attributives. This is because the reference is unmistakably clear to both or all parties in the communication.

你看，你怎么把好好的一件衣服弄成这个样子？

nǐ kàn | nǐ zénme bǎ hǎohǎo de yī jiàn yīfu nòng chéng zhèi ge yàngzi

(lit. you look you how cv: grasping good-good **de** one mw clothing make-become this mw appearance)

Look, how could you get a perfectly good suit/shirt/jacket etc into this kind of state?

They often occur in narrative speech, where an immediate impression is needed. Here are two examples:

魔术师走上舞台，把两只空杯子放在面前的桌子上，当他再伸手把它们拿起来的时候，里面竟装满了水。

móshùshī zǒu shàng wǔtái | bǎ liǎng zhī kōng bēizi fàng zài miànqián de zhuōzi shang | dāng tā zài shēnshǒu bǎ tāmen ná qǐlái de shíhou | lǐmiàn jìng zhuāng mǎn le shuǐ

(lit. magician walk on stage, cv:grasping two mw empty glasses place cv:on in front **de** table on, when he again stretch out hand cv:grasping them pick up come **de** time, inside unexpectedly fill full **le** water)

The magician walked on to the stage and put two empty glasses on the table in front of him, but, when he stretched out his hands and picked them up, they were filled with water.

奶奶把一只玉镯从自己胳膊腕儿上褪下来，给孙女戴上。

**nǎinai bǎ yī zhī yùzhuó cóng zìjǐ gēbowànr shang tùn xiàlai |
gěi sūnnǚ dài shàng**

(lit. grandma cv:grasping one mw jade bracelet cv:from own wrist on
slip down come, cv:for granddaughter put on)

Grandma slipped a jade bracelet from her wrist and put it on her
granddaughter.

In some cases, a ‘numeral + measure’ phrase is, of course, indispensable:

她把两首歌的词儿唱串了。

tā bǎ liǎng shǒu gē de cí chàng chuàn le

(lit. she cv: grasping two mw songs **de** words sing mix up **le**)

When she sang, she mixed up the words of two songs.

老大爷眼花，把上下两行的字儿看串了。

lǎodàyé yǎnhuā | bǎ shàngxià liǎng háng de zì kàn chuàn le

(grandpa eyes dim cv: grasping above-below two lines **de** words read
mix up **le**)

‘Grandpa’s eyes were dim and he mixed up the words on two lines of
writing.’

12.6 把 **bǎ** versus 将 **jiāng**

In a less colloquial and more formal style, 将 **jiāng** may be used in place
of 把 **bǎ**:

特将详细的情况报告如下。

tè jiāng xiángxì de qíngkuàng bàogào rúxià

(lit. especially cv:grasping detailed situation report as follows)

I hereby report the detailed situation as follows.

以免将谈判弄僵了。

yímiǎn jiāng tánpàn nòngjiāng le

(lit. avoid cv:grasping negotiation make-deadlock **le**)

To avoid bringing the negotiation to a deadlock.

The passive voice and 被 bèi constructions

It has often been suggested that the passive voice is not as commonly used in Chinese as in European languages. There is certainly some truth in this, in that the Chinese language, being meaning oriented and not morphologically stringent, seems to rely more heavily on context than on grammatical form. The language avoids the use of formal passive voice markers (e.g. 被 *bèi*) until it is perfectly necessary, but from a broader perspective, it is possible to see that the passive voice in Chinese in its various forms, marked or unmarked, does occur widely and, as such, may be just as frequently encountered in Chinese (both in speech and in writing) as in European languages.

13.1 Three forms of passive

The passive voice in Chinese may adopt any of the following three forms depending on the required tone and emphasis:

- (a) **the notional passive** – where no formal passive marker is employed. This passive normally carries an expository tone.

问题 || 解决了。¹*wéntí || jiějué le*
(lit. problem || solve *le*) The problem was/has been solved.

¹ Note that the result expressed in the complement of all notional passive constructions is invariably associated with some kind of change in a situation. The sentence particle 了 *le* is therefore always present.

- (b) **the formal passive** – where a passive marker like 被 *bèi* is introduced. Here, the tone is usually narrative:

问题 || 终被解决。*wéntí || zhōng bèi jiějué*
(lit. problem || finally *bèi*:by solve) The problem was finally solved.

- (c) the **lexical passive** – where a verb, indicating that the subject or the topic is the ‘receiver’ of the action, is followed by a nominalised verbal object. Whether this passive is built into a narrative or an exposition, the tone tends to be rather formal.

问题 || 得到了解决。 **wéntí || dédào le jiějué**

(lit. problem || receive **le** solution)

A solution was found for the problem.

问题 || 得到解决了。 **wéntí || dédào jiějué le**

(lit. problem || receive solution **le**)

A solution has been found for the problem.

We will now look at the specific features of these passive forms.

13.2 The notional passive

The notional passive is the most common form of passive voice in the language. The structure is possible only with a non-morphological language like Chinese, where speakers are accustomed to relying as much on meaning as on form. Take the following example:

信 || 寄走了。 **xìn || jì zǒu le**

(lit. letter || send off **le**)

The letter has been put in the post.

Here, there is of course no danger of the hearer misinterpreting the statements as meaning that the letter has initiated the action of sending itself, despite the fact that there is no indication of a passive voice in the verb.

The notional passive in fact avoids passive markers by relying on the hearer’s common sense or knowledge of the world. It offers (or invites – in the form of a question) an updated explanation or description of a situation. Essentially, what is happening with a notional passive is that the original object of the verb is now posed as the topic under discussion and is shifted to the beginning of the sentence. This is clear from the following structural conversion:

我 || 已经寄了信了。 **wǒ || yǐjīng jì le xìn le**

(lit. I || already send **le** letter **le**)

I have (already) put the letter in the post.

where 信 **xìn** ‘letter’ is the object of the predicate verb 寄 **jì** ‘send; post’.

Moving the object in the above sentence to the beginning of the sentence, we have:

信 || 我 || 已经寄了。 **xìn || wǒ || yǐjīng jì le**
(lit. letter || I || already send **le**)

As for the letter, I have already put it in the post.

The original object has now become the topic and occurs before the original subject, while the aspect marker *le* indicating the completion of the action merges with the sentence particle *le* (for updating the information) to convey both meanings. Apart from these changes, the rest of the original sentence remains intact. If we leave out the original subject 我 ‘I’, the sentence becomes a notional passive, with the topic alone directly affected by the predicate comment:

信 || 已经寄了。 **xìn || yǐjīng jì le**
(lit. letter || already send **le**) The letter has already been sent.

The term ‘notional passive’ derives from the fact that the sentence, though apparently a straightforward ‘topic || explanatory comment’ structure, is really an ‘object (now turned topic) || transitive verb’ construction. It is passive in its underlying meaning but without a surface passive marker.

Being a conversion from an originally ‘verb + object’ construction, the notional passive naturally has a transitive verb in the comment. An intransitive verb gives an unacceptable meaning relationship between the noun and the verb. For example, a sentence like

*信 || 已经走了。 **xìn || yǐjīng zǒu le**
(lit. letter || already leave **le**) *The letter has already departed.

in which 走 *zǒu* ‘leave’ is an intransitive verb, could be understood only in a metaphorical sense.

In addition, as the notional passive is an explanatory comment on a situation, the verb, particularly if it is monosyllabic, generally has to incorporate a complement of some kind, which indicates the relevant consequence of the action or the features attributable to the situation under discussion. The complement takes various forms, which are similar to those in the 把 *bǎ* construction, and which most commonly indicate the following:

(a) result:

信 || 收到了。 **xìn || shōudào le**
(lit. the letter || receive-arrive **le**)
The letter has been received.

窗户 || 打开了。 **chuānghu || dǎkāi le**
(lit. the window || hit-open **le**) The window has been opened.

房间 || 收拾好了。 **fángjiān || shōushi hǎo le**
(lit. the room || tidy-well **le**) The room has been tidied.

桌子 || 抹干净了。 **zhuōzi || mā gānjìng le**
(lit. the table || wipe-clean **le**) The table has been wiped clean.

(b) direction:

衣服 || 晾出去了。 **yīfu || liàng chūqu le**
(lit. the clothes || hang out-go **le**)
The clothes have been put out to dry.

电话号码 || 抄下来了。 **diànhuà hàomǎ || chāo xiàlai le**
(lit. telephone number || copy down-come **le**)
The telephone number has been transcribed.

大箱子 || 放不进去了。 **dà xiāngzi || fàngbujìnqu le**
(lit. big case || place not enter-go **le**)
The big case can't be fitted in.

(c) location:

招贴画 || 贴在墙上了。
zhāotiēhuà || tiē zài qiáng shàng le
(lit. the poster || stick cv:on wall-on **le**)
The poster is stuck on the wall.

行李 || 放在行李架上了。
xíngli || fàng zài xínglijià shàng le
(lit. the luggage || place cv:on the luggage rack-on **le**)
The luggage is (placed) on the luggage rack.

(d) frequency:

这个电影 || 已经放映过两次了。
zhèi ge diànyǐng || yǐjīng fāngyìng guo liǎng cì le
(lit. this film || already show **guo** two times **le**)
This film has already been shown twice.

那篇文章 || 改了很多次了。
nèi piān wénzhāng || gǎi le hěnduō cì le
(lit. that mw essay || revise **le** very many times **le**)
That essay has been revised many times.

(e) duration:

那场戏 || 演了三个月了。 **nèi chǎng xì || yǎn le sān ge yuè le**
(lit. that mw play || perform **le** three mw months **le**)
That play has been on for three months.

这个菜 || 放了两天了。 **zhèi ge cài || fàng le liǎng tiān le**
(lit. this mw dish || put **le** two days **le**)
This dish has been left/has not been touched for two days running.

(f) manner and appearance:

书 || 放得整整齐齐的。 **shū || fàng de zhěngzhěngqíqí de**
(lit. the books || place **de** whole-whole-flush-flush **de**)
The books have been arranged very neatly.

字 || 写得歪歪斜斜的。 **zì || xiě de wāiwāixiéxié de**
(lit. the characters || write **de** crooked-crooked-slant-slant **de**)
The characters have been written in a crooked fashion.

The complement, however, may be replaced by an object that relates semantically to the topic, often in part for whole terms:

那封信 || 写了三张纸。 **nèi fēng xìn || xiě le sān zhāng zhǐ**
(lit. that mw letter || write **le** three mw:sheet paper)
That letter has been written using three sheets of paper.

那瓶酒 || 喝了一半。 **nèi píng jiǔ || hē le yī bàn**
(lit. that mw:bottle wine || drink **le** a half)
Half of that bottle of wine has been consumed.

土豆 || 削了皮了。 **tǔdòu || xiāo le pí le**
(lit. the potatoes || peel **le** skin **le**)
The potatoes have been peeled.

汽车 || 加了油了。 **qìchē || jiā le yóu le**
(lit. the car || add **le** petrol **le**)
The car has been refuelled.

Some verbs carry the meaning of result within them:

那件工作 || 完成了。 **nèi jiàn gōngzuò || wánchéng le**
(lit. that mw work || complete **le**)
That job has been carried out.

理想 || 实现了。 **lǐxiǎng || shíxián le**
(lit. the ideal || realise **le**)
The dream has been fulfilled.

Verbs in a notional passive are generally couched in a disyllabic form. If the verb used is monosyllabic, it has to be supported pre-verbally or post-verbally by modals, adverbials or particles, or to be echoed in a rhythmic pattern:

(a) pre-verbal support:

信 || 可以寄了。 **xìn || kěyǐ jì le**

(lit. the letter || can send **le**)

The letter can now be sent.

信 || 已经寄了。 **xìn || yǐjīng jì le**

(lit. the letter || already send **le**)

The letter has already been sent.

(b) post-verbal support:

信 || 寄了没有? **xìn || jì le méiyǒu?**

(lit. the letter || send **le** have not)

Has the letter been sent or not?

信 || 寄了吗? **xìn || jì le ma?**

(lit. the letter || send **le ma**)

Has the letter been sent?

(c) rhythmic pattern:

信 || 寄了, 饭 || 煮了, 你要我办的事儿 || 都办了。

xìn || jì le | fàn || zhǔ le | nǐ yào wǒ bàn de shìr || dōu bàn le

(lit. the letter || send **le**, the rice || cook **le**, you-want-me-to-do
things || all do **le**)

The letter has been sent, the meal has been prepared, everything
you want me to do has been done.

As was said earlier, a notional passive is designed to offer or invite an explanatory comment on a situation. The focus or emphasis is therefore often on an observed or foreseen result that has a bearing on the situation. This being the case, modals and/or adverbials in the form of time nouns or referential adverbs often form a natural part of the comment in expository or evaluative sentences. For example:

(a) modal:

你的鞋 || 应该擦一擦。 **nǐde xié || yīnggāi cā yī cā**

(lit. your shoes || should | brush one brush)

Yours shoes should be given a brush.

(b) time adverbial:

我家的阴沟 || 经常堵塞。

wǒ jiā de yīngōu || jīngcháng dǔsè

(lit. my home **de** drains || often block)

Drains in my house often get blocked.

(c) referential adverb:

花园里的花儿 || 都浇了水了。

huāyuán lǐ de huār || dōu jiāo le shuǐ le

(lit. the garden-inside **de** flower || all sprinkle **le** water **le**)

All the flowers in the garden have been watered.

On the other hand, adverbials of manner often occur with notional passives in narrative or descriptive sentences:

信 || 胡乱地拆开看了之后，就随随便便地扔在桌子上。

**xìn || húluàn de chāikāi kàn le zhīhòu | jiù suísuǐbiànbàn de
rēng zài zhuōzi shàng**

(lit. the letter || carelessly tear open read **le** after, then casually throw
cv:on table-top)

After the letter had been carelessly torn open and read, it was
casually thrown on the table.

In sentences like these, the formal passive marker 被 **bèi**,² as a standard feature of narrative, can be introduced to give a slightly more vivid picture of the incident or situation being narrated or described. The above sentence, for example, may be converted into a formal passive with the meaning remaining essentially unchanged:

信 || 被胡乱地拆开看了之后，就被随随便便地扔在桌子上。

**xìn || bèi húluàn de chāikāi kàn le zhīhòu | jiù bèi
suísuǐbiànbàn de rēng zài zhuōzi shàng**

² See §13.3 below.

If anything, the addition of 被 **bèi** associates the actions of ‘tearing the letter open’ and ‘throwing it down’ more closely with the person unspecified who carried them out.

The negation of a notional passive is normally achieved by placing the negator 没(有) **méi(yǒu)** immediately before the verb. For example:

问题 || 还没解决。 **wèntí || hái méi jiějué**

(lit. the problem || still not solve)

The problem has not yet been solved.

Once the negator is used, 了 *le* as either aspect marker or sentence particle can no longer occur. As a result, monosyllabic verbs need to be linked with complements or similar lengthening devices. A positive statement like:

信 || 已经寄了。 **xìn || yǐjīng jì le**

(lit. the letter || already send *le*)

The letter has already been sent.

will therefore convert to the negative in ways like the following:

(a) with the help of a complement

信 || 还没寄走。 **xìn || hái méi jì zǒu**

(lit. the letter || still not send off)

The letter has not been sent off yet.

信 || 还没寄出去。 **xìn || hái méi jì chūqu**

(lit. letter || still not send out)

The letter has not been sent yet.

(b) with the help of a particle other than 了 *le* after the verb:

信 || 还没寄呢。

xìn || hái méi jì ne

(lit. letter || still not send *ne*)

The letter has not been sent off yet. (connotation: I'm sorry to say.)

In a more formal written text, 尚未 *shàng wèi* 'not yet' may be used instead of 还没 *hái méi* 'not yet'. For example,

问题 || 尚未解决。

wèntí || shàng wèi jiějué

(lit. problem || still not solve)

The problem has not yet been solved.

信 || 尚未寄走。

xìn || shàng wèi jì zǒu

(lit. letter || still not send off)

The letter has not been sent off yet.

Where a sentence is suppositional and refers to a future situation, the negative is expressed by 不 *bù* 'not' rather than 没(有) *méi(yǒu)*.

工作 || 不完成, 我 || 不睡觉。

gōngzuò || bù wánchéng | wǒ || bù shuìjiào

(lit. the work || not complete, I || not sleep)

If the work is not completed, I won't go to bed.

不 *bù* ‘not’ is also used in sentences where time adverbs indicate a habit or customary practice:

推销员打来的电话 || 通常不接。

tūixiāoyuán dǎ lái de diànhuà || tōngcháng bù jiē
(lit. salesman make **de** telephone call || usually not receive)
Telephone calls from salesmen usually are not taken.

In all our examples so far of notional passives, the topics have been inanimate objects; where the topic is a human or animate being, ambiguity can arise. For example:

他的助手 || 借走了。

tāde zhùshǒu || jiè zǒu le
(lit. his assistant || borrow away **le**)

topic || comment: His assistant has been borrowed (by somebody else for another project).

subject || predicate: His assistant has borrowed it (something understood in the given context).

The first interpretation sees the sentence as a notional passive in which as usual an ‘unspecified doer’ (in this case, maybe a boss or professor) has inflicted the action of the verb on the topic (his assistant). In the second interpretation, the verb is in the active voice, and the subject (his assistant) has borrowed something that is unspecified but is clear from the context (a book, computer, etc.).³ In the great majority of cases, the context makes the meaning perfectly clear, but nonetheless there is the possibility of ambiguity in cases like these.

³ Absence of specification like this, where identification is self-evident from the context, is a feature of the Chinese language (see [Chapter 25](#)).

To avoid this, speakers normally use formal or lexical passive markers. For example, a sentence like:

他的助手 || 救活了。

tāde zhùshǒu || jiù huó le
(lit. his assistant || save alive **le**)

could be open to two potential interpretations:

topic || comment: His assistant was saved (e.g. by the doctor).

subject || predicate: His assistant has saved the life of somebody else (understood in the context).

To ensure that the passive meaning of ‘His assistant was saved’ is understood, it would be possible to include either a formal passive marker:

他的助手 || 被救活了。

tāde zhùshǒu || *bèi* jiù huó le

(lit. his assistant || *bèi* save alive *le*)

or to adopt, if possible, a lexical passive strategy (see §13.4):

他的助手 || 得救了。

tāde zhùshǒu || *déjiù* le

(lit. his assistant || receive save *le*)

13.3 The formal passive

13.3.1 Salient features

The most salient feature of a formal passive is the inclusion of the coverb 被 *bèi* as a formal passive marker to indicate that the subject of the sentence, instead of initiating the action specified in the predicate verb, is actually the ‘receiver’ of the action. The identity of the actual initiator of the action may be revealed immediately after 被 *bèi* or it may remain unstated or vague. For example:

(a) identity unstated:

那个警察 || 被打伤了。

nèi ge jǐngchá || *bèi* dǎshāng le

(lit. that mw policeman || *bèi*:by hit-wounded *le*)

That policeman was wounded.

(b) identity vague:

那个警察 || 被人打伤了。

nèi ge jǐngchá || *bèi* rén dǎshāng le

(lit. that mw policeman || *bèi*:by somebody hit-wounded *le*)

That policeman was wounded (by somebody).

(c) initiator revealed:

那个警察 || 被流氓打伤了。

nèi ge jǐngchá || *bèi* liúmáng dǎshāng le

(lit. that mw policeman || *bèi*:by hooligan hit-wounded *le*)

That policeman was wounded by hooligans.

In speech, the more formal passive marker 被 *bèi* may be replaced by 让 *ràng*, 叫 *jiào*/教 *jiào*, 给 *gěi* or 让 *ràng*...给 *gěi*, 叫 *jiào*...给 *gěi*, etc. In these cases, the initiator is either identified precisely or vaguely. For example, sentences (b) or (c) above could take any one of the following forms:

让 <i>ràng</i>	那个警察 让人/流氓打伤了。 nèi ge jǐngchá ràng rén/liúmáng dǎshāng le
叫 <i>jiào</i> /	那个警察 叫人/流氓打伤了。
教 <i>jiào</i>	nèi ge jǐngchá jiào rén/liúmáng dǎshāng le
给 <i>gěi</i>	那个警察 给人/流氓打伤了。 nèi ge jǐngchá gěi rén/liúmáng dǎshāng le
让 <i>ràng</i> ...	那个警察 让人/流氓给打伤了。
给 <i>gěi</i>	nèi ge jǐngchá ràng rén/liúmáng gěi dǎshāng le
叫 <i>jiào</i> ...	那个警察 叫人/流氓给打伤了。
给 <i>gěi</i>	nèi ge jǐngchá jiào rén/liúmáng gěi dǎshāng le

13.3.2 Basic characteristics

As mentioned earlier, the basic characteristic of a formal passive is its inbuilt narrative stance. Compared with the notional passive, which can occur in any type of sentence, the formal passive is generally more committed to the narration or description of an incident or event that has already taken place. For example, in the following two pairs of sentences, a notional passive (i) is felt to be less plausible than the formal passive (ii):

- (a) (i) + 那天下午门 || 撬开了。
+ **nèi tiān xiàwǔ mén || qiào kāi le**
(lit. that day afternoon the door || prize open *le*)
- (ii) 那天下午门 || 被撬开了。
nèi tiān xiàwǔ mén || bèi qiào kāi le
(lit. that day afternoon the door || **bei**:by (somebody) prize open *le*)
That afternoon the door was prised open (by somebody).
- (b) (i) + 不久小偷 || 抓住了。
+ **bùjiǔ xiǎotōu || zhuā zhù le**
(lit. not long after the thief || catch firm *le*)
- (ii) 不久小偷 || 被抓住了。
bùjiǔ xiǎotōu || bèi zhuā zhù le
(lit. not long after the thief || **bei**:by catch firm *le*)
Not long after, the thief was caught.

A further distinction between formal and notional passives is that, while the latter is normally objective in stance and can accommodate complements of positive or negative meaning, formal passives tend to convey a negative sense. The two sentences below demonstrate the contrasting meanings possible with a notional passive:

- (a) 饭 || 煮好了。 **fàn || zhǔ hǎo le**
(lit. the rice || cook well **le**) The rice is cooked.

饭 || 煮糊了。 **fàn || zhǔ hú le**
(lit. the rice || cook burnt **le**) The rice is burnt.

The expectation that the outcome of a formal passive will be negative means that, if the same two sentences have a passive marker, only the second will be acceptable:

- (a) *饭 || 被煮好了。 ***fàn || bèi zhǔ hǎo le**
(lit. the rice || **bèi**:by cook well **le**) *The rice has been cooked.

饭 || 被煮糊了。 **fàn || bèi zhǔ hú le**
(lit. the rice || **bèi**:by cook burnt **le**) The rice has been burnt.

- (b) *饭 || 让我给煮好了。 ***fàn || ràng wǒ gěi zhǔ hǎo le**
(lit. the rice || **ràng**:by me **gěi** cook well **le**)
The rice has been cooked by me.

饭 || 让我给煮糊了。 **fàn || ràng wǒ gěi zhǔ hú le**
(lit. the rice || **ràng**:by me **gěi** cook burnt **le**)
The rice was burnt by me.

Here are a few more examples of the undesirable outcomes of formal passives:

电视机 || 被我弄坏了。 **diànshìjī || bèi wǒ nòng huài le**
(lit. the television set || **bèi**:by me handle-damaged **le**)
The television was damaged by me.

衣服让我给弄脏了。 **yīfu || ràng wǒ gěi nòng zāng le**
(lit. the clothes || **ràng**:by me **gěi** make-dirty **le**)
The clothes were dirtied by me.

钥匙叫他给弄丢了。 **yàoshi || jiào tā gěi nòng diū le**
(lit. the key || **jiào**:by him make-lose **le**) The key was lost by him.

气球被小弟弟戳破了。 **qìqiú || bèi xiǎo dìdì chuōpò le**
(lit. the balloon || **bèi**:by little younger brother poke-break **le**)
The balloon was burst by younger brother.

那棵树被大风刮倒了。 **nèi kē shù || bèi dà fēng guā dǎo le**
(lit. that mw tree || **bei**:by great wind blow-fall **le**)
That tree was blown down by the gale.

小妹妹被我们笑得不好意思了。
xiǎo mèimei || bèi wǒmen xiào de bù hǎo yìsi le
(lit. little younger sister || **bei**:by us laugh **de** embarrassed **le**)
Little sister was embarrassed by our teasing.

腿上叫蚊子给叮了一下。
tuǐ shàng || jiào wénzi gěi dīng le yīxià
(lit. leg-on || **jiao**:by mosquito bite **le** one time)
I/(s)he was bitten on the leg by a mosquito.

绒大衣被虫子蛀了一个窟窿。
róng dàyī || bèi chōngzi zhù le yī ge kūlong
(lit. the woollen overcoat || **bei**:by moth eat **le** one mw hole)
The woollen overcoat had a hole eaten in it by a moth.

13.3.3 Imperatives

In imperatives, the formal 被 **bèi** cannot be used, but the other more colloquial alternatives are acceptable:

别让开水给烫着。 **bié ràng kāishuǐ || gěi tàng zhe**
(lit. don't **rang**:by boiling water **gei** scald-reach)
Don't get scalded by the boiling water.

别叫雨把行李给淋湿了。 **bié jiào yǔ bǎ xíngli || gěi línshī le**
(lit. don't **jiao**:by rain **ba**:grasping luggage **gei** soak-wet **le**)
Don't let the luggage get soaked by the rain.

13.3.4 Whole-part relationships

It is not unusual for a formal passive to incorporate a 把 **bǎ** construction if the subject of the sentence and the object of 把 **bǎ** have a whole-part relationship. For example:

新书 || 被小妹妹 | 把封面 | 撕掉了。
xīn shū || bèi xiǎo mèimei | bǎ fēngmiàn | sī diào le
the new book || **bei**:by little sister | **ba**:grasping cover | tear-off **le**
The cover of the new book was torn off by little sister.

in which 新书 **xīn shū** ‘the new book’ and 封面 **fēngmiàn** ‘the cover’ have a whole-part relationship.

In other words, the subject must represent the whole entity, while the object of 把 **bǎ** must represent part of it.

Here is another example:

姐姐 || 叫滾水 | 把手 | 给烫伤了。

jiějie || jiào gǔnshuǐ | bǎ shǒu | gěi tàng shāng le

elder sister || **jiao**:by boiling water | **ba**:grasping hand | **gei**:by
scald-hurt **le**

My elder sister had her hand scalded by boiling water.

13.3.5 A classical variant

A classical variant of the formal passive is encoded by 为 **wéi**... 所 **suǒ** 为 **wéi**, like 被 **bèi**, is followed by the initiator of the action in the verb, while 所 **suǒ** precedes the verb itself. In this formal passive construction, the verb may be monosyllabic or disyllabic and does not need any complement.

他的讲话 || 为掌声所淹没。

tāde jiǎnghuà || wéi zhǎngshēng suǒ yānmò

(lit. his speech || **wéi**:by applause **suo** drown)

His speech was drowned by the applause.

这位老师 || 为他的学生所爱戴。

zhèwèi lǎoshī || wéi tāde xuésheng suǒ àidài

(lit. this mw teacher || **wéi**:by his students **suo** love-esteem)

This teacher was loved by his students.

这样的丑事 || 必然为人所笑。

zhèyàng de chǒushì || bìrán wéi rén suǒ xiào

(lit. this kind **de** scandal || inevitably **wéi**:by people **suo** laugh)

This kind of scandal is inevitably laughed at by people.

13.4 The lexical passive

In a lexical passive, the subject of the sentence is the receiver of an action, which is the formal object of a particular set of verbs such as 得到 **dédào** ‘get’, 受到 **shòudào** ‘receive’, 遭到 **zāodào** ‘suffer (from)’. The true initiator of the action is identified as an attributive to the formal object. Though

the syntactic construction of a lexical passive is a straightforward SVO, the important presence of the initiator modifies this to SV attributive O, where

S = receiver of the action

V = 'receiving' verb

O = action initiated by somebody else

attributive to O = initiator

In other words, the semantic formula of the sentence is:

receiver + verb + initiator (as an attributive) + nominalised verb

For example:

他 || 得到 | 朋友们的支持。 **tā || dédào | péngyoumen de zhīchí**
(lit. he || get | friends' support)

He won the support of his friends./He was supported by his friends.⁴

⁴ The alternative English translation is here to show that a lexical passive in Chinese may be a formal passive in English.

The formal object of the 'receive' verb is always a nominalised verb. It cannot therefore incorporate a complement and it must adopt a disyllabic form. One cannot say, for example:

*他受到大家的罚。 ***tā shòudào dàjiā de fá**

*He received everyone's punishment.

Nor is the addition of a complement acceptable, as the formal object is now itself a noun:

*他受到大家的罚一次。 ***tā shòudào dàjiā de fá yī cì**

*He received a punishment from everyone.

Also being a nominalised form it does not take an object of its own:

*他受到大家的罚一镑。 ***tā shòudào dàjiā de fá yī bàng**

*He received a penalty of one pound from everyone.

An acceptable formulation can be achieved, however, through the juxtaposition of another monosyllabic verb or through the addition of an attributive:

他受到大家的惩罚。 **tā shòudào dàjiā de chéngfá**

(lit. he received everyone's punishment/penalty)

He was punished/penalised by everyone.

他受到大家的重罚。 **tā shòudào dàjiā de zhòngfá**

(lit. he receive everyone's heavy punishment/penalty)

He was heavily punished/penalised by everyone.

Other examples are:

他的话受到人们的赞赏。

tāde huà shòudào rénmen de zànsǎng

(lit. his words receive people's admiration)

His words were admired by people.

她的行为遭到父母的批评。

tāde xíngwéi zāodào fùmǔ de pīpíng

(lit. her behaviour suffer parents' criticism)

Her behaviour met with criticism from her parents/was criticised by her parents.

我的建议得到我妹妹的支持。

wǒde jiànyì dédào wǒ mèimei de zhīchí

(lit. my suggestion get my younger sister's support)

My suggestion gained my younger sister's support/was supported by my younger sister.

In a notional or a formal passive, the nature of the outcome of an action is expressed by the complement. The initiator of the action is often not mentioned since it is the outcome that is important. In a lexical passive, however, the focus shifts to the initiator of the action or to the degree or extent to which the action has been carried out. In other words, the emphasis is on the object (the nominalised verb) with its attributive, and the sentence loses focus without an attributive:

*他 || 得到支持。***tā || dédào zhīchí**

(lit. he || get support) *He won support.

The attributive encodes semantically either the initiator and/or the extent to which the action is carried out:

(a) attributive = initiator:

她受到老师的批评。

tā shòudào làoshī de pīpíng

(lit. she receive teacher's criticism)

She was criticised by the teacher.

(b) attributive = degree or extent to which the action was carried out:

她受到严厉的批评。

tā shòudào yánlì de pīpíng

(lit. she receive severe **de** criticism)

She was severely criticised.

- (c) attributive = initiator + degree or extent to which the action was carried out:

她受到老师严厉的批评。

tā shòudào lǎoshī yánlì de pīpíng

(lit. she receive teacher severe **de** criticism)

She was severely criticised by the teacher.

Similar examples are:

老师得到学生的尊敬。

lǎoshī dédào xuésheng de zūnjìng

(lit. the teacher receive students' respect)

The teacher was respected by the students.

经理受到多方的责难。

jīnglǐ shòudào duōfāng de zénàn

(lit. the manager receive many parties' censure/blame)

The manager was blamed on all fronts.

来宾受到热烈的欢迎。

láibīn shòudào rèliè de huānyíng

(lit. the guests receive warm **de** welcome)

The guests were warmly welcomed.

他遭到沉重的打击。

tā zāodào chénzhòng de dǎjī

(lit. he suffer heavy **de** blow)

He suffered heavy [psychological] blows.

The three most commonly used verbs in a lexical passive, 得到 **dédào**, 受到 **shòudào** and 遭到 **zāodào**, have their semantic individualities. While 得到 **dédào** is usually used in a positive sense and 遭到 **zāodào** in a negative sense, 受到 **shòudào** is generally neutral, as we can clearly see from the above examples. Compare the following pairs of sentences:

*学生得到老师的批评。

***xuésheng dédào lǎoshī de pīpíng**

(lit. the students get teacher's criticism)

学生得到老师的表扬。

xuésheng dédào lǎoshī de biǎoyáng

(lit. the students get teacher's praise)

The students were praised by the teacher.

*来宾遭到热烈的欢迎。

***láibīn zāodào rèliè de huānyíng**

(lit. the guests suffer warm **de** welcome)

来宾遭到主人的冷落。

láibīn zāodào zhǔrén de lěngluò

(lit. the guests suffer host's cold-shoulder/neglect)

The guests were cold-shouldered/neglected by the host.

however:

他的建议受到人们的赞赏。

tāde jiànyì shòudào rénmen de zànshǎng

(lit. his suggestion receive people's admiration)

His suggestion was admired/well received by people.

他的建议受到人们的反对。

tāde jiànyì shòudào rénmen de fǎnduì

(lit. his suggestion receive people's opposition)

His suggestion was opposed by people.

In terms of register, a notional passive is always extremely colloquial, while a formal passive can be made informal by replacing 被 **bèi** with 让 **ràng** or 叫 **jiào** plus 给 **gěi**. On the other hand, a lexical passive is always extremely formal, having a nominalised verb that is usually more abstract than physical in nature.

In addition, a lexical passive generally has a disyllabic nominalised verb as the formal object of a disyllabic 'receive' verb, which has a V + 到 **dào** structure. There is, however, an alternative form of lexical passive that makes use of a set of disyllabic expressions in a V + N format. This alternative form is unmodifiable in syntactic terms and it is found only in established lexical collocations, for example:

遭殃	zāoyāng	to meet with disaster ⁵
罹难	línàn	to meet with misfortune
受伤	shòushāng	to be injured, wounded (lit. receive injury)
得救	déjiù	to be saved (lit. get rescue)
惹祸	rěhuò	to court disaster
遇险	yùxiǎn	to run into danger

⁵ The English translations here do not necessarily reflect the passive sense of the Chinese.

As the V + N format is self-sufficient and is itself the focal point, there is no need for an attributive, unlike the syntactically modifiable lexical passive. For example:

孩子受了伤。 **háizi shòu le shāng**

(lit. the child receive **le** injury)

The child was injured.

人质遇难了。 **rénzhì yùànàn le**

(lit. the hostage meet calamity **le**)

The hostage was killed.

病人得救了。 **bìngrén déjiù le**

(lit. the patient get-rescue **le**)

The patient was saved.

Chain constructions

Chinese, unlike English, does not have verb forms like infinitives, participles or gerunds. Such functions are all covered by the bare verbal stem, that is, the uninflected verb. This being the case, these bare verbs are often seen strung together in a series of two or three to form the predicate of a sentence in what we call a chain (or serial) construction. They are arranged in accordance with an intrinsic time sequence. For example:

我 || 骑车 | 到火车站 | 去 | 买票。

wǒ || qí chē | dào huǒchēzhàn | qù | mǎi piào

(lit. I || ride bike | cv: to (i.e. arriving at) railway station | go | buy ticket)

Getting on my bike, I rode to the railway station to get a ticket.

The English translation of the above may also be constructed as, for example: ‘To buy a ticket, I went to the railway station by bike’, where the presence of the infinitive and the preposition allows for a flexible ordering of the verbal phrases. Without linguistic facilities like these, Chinese can only resort to strict time sequencing in terms of meaning. In this case, for example, one has to get on a bike before starting off in the direction of the railway station, and one has to reach the station before going to the ticket office to buy a ticket. Hence, the order of the three verbs or verbal phrases is fixed: first 骑车 **qí chē** ‘to ride a bicycle’, second 到火车站去 **dào huǒchēzhàn qù** ‘to go to the railway station’ and third 买票 **mǎi piào** ‘to buy a ticket’.

In the following sections, we shall look at the meaning relationships generally found between the verbs in chain constructions.

14.1 The first verb introducing a coverbal phrase that indicates location, etc.

The first verb in a chain construction can often be a verb, usually a coverb, indicating a location, destination, etc. Location phrases are normally marked by 在 *zài* ‘to exist; at; in’, destination phrases by 到 *dào* ‘to arrive; to’, direction phrases by 向 *xiàng* ‘in the direction of’.¹

我妻子在花园里种花。

wǒ qīzi zài huāyuán lǐ zhòng huā

(lit. my wife cv:at garden-inside grow flower)

My wife is planting flowers in the garden.

孩子们到游乐场去玩儿。

háizimen dào yóulèchǎng qù wánr

(lit. children cv:to pleasure-park go play)

The children go to play at the funfair.

邻居的狗向我跑来。

línjū de gǒu xiàng wǒ pǎo lái

(lit. neighbour's dog cv:towards me run-come)

The neighbour's dog ran up to me.

¹ See Chapter 11 on coverbs.

Coverbal phrases indicating destination are usually followed by 去 *qù* ‘to go’ or 来 *lái* ‘to come’, either as the main verb itself or as part of the main verb. In the case of direction coverbs, 来 *lái* ‘to come’ or 去 *qù* ‘to go’ always form part of the main verb. For instance, in the destination sentence above, 孩子们到游乐场去玩儿 *háizimen dào yóulèchǎng qù wánr* ‘The children go to play at the funfair’, 去 *qù* is juxtaposed with 玩儿 *wánr* ‘to play’ indicating purpose.

However the sentence could be modified as follows:

(a) 孩子们到游乐场去。

háizimen dào yóulèchǎng qù

(lit. children cv: arriving at funfair go)

The children went to the funfair.

(where 去 *qù* is the main verb)

(b) 孩子们到游乐场玩儿去。

háizimen dào yóulèchǎng wánr qù

(lit. children cv: arriving at funfair play-go)

The children went to play at the funfair.

(where 去 *qù* forms part of the main verb with 玩儿 *wánr* ‘to play’)

Similarly with direction coverbs you can have:

警犬朝我扑过来。

jǐngquǎn cháo wǒ pū guòlai

(lit. police dog cv:towards me
jump-over-come)

The police dog jumped at me.

(where 过来 **guòlai**

'over and towards'

forms part of the main

verb with 扑 **pū** 'to

jump at')

海鸥向海面飞去。

hǎi'ōu xiàng hǎimiàn fēi qù

(lit. seagull cv:towards sea-surface fly-go)

The seagull flew down to the sea.

(where 去 **qù** forms part

of the main verb with

飞 **fēi** 'to fly')

14.2 The second verb indicating purpose

In English, adverbials expressed in terms of infinitives often indicate purpose. In Chinese, purpose is expressed simply by a second verb in a chain construction.

我买了一个礼物送给她。

wǒ mǎi le yī ge lǐwù sòng gěi tā

(lit. I buy **le** one mw present give cv:to her)

I bought a present to give to her.

孩子们都回家来过圣诞节。

háizimen dōu huíjiā lái guò shèngdànjié

(lit. children all return home come pass Christmas)

The children all come home for Christmas.

救火车赶到现场去救火。

jiùhuǒchē gǎn dào xiànchǎng qù jiùhuǒ

(lit. fire engine rush cv:arriving at scene go fight fire)

The fire engine rushed to the scene (to fight the fire).

我们到电影院去看电影。

wǒmen dào diànyǐngyuàn qù kàn diànyǐng

(lit. we cv:arriving at cinema go see film)

We went to the cinema (to see a film).

It should be noted that, in encoding purposes, there are often cultural differences between Chinese and European languages, as can be seen from the last two examples above. In English, when a fire engine comes to a scene or somebody goes to the cinema, the purpose is self-evident and to

express it might be felt to be tautological. In Chinese, however, purpose is generally spelled out whether self-explanatory or not.

Another point to note is that 来 *lái* ‘to come’ and 去 *qù* ‘to go’ are often used in connection with purpose, and are usually placed before the second verb. More colloquially, they may also be found after the second verb or even both before and after it. Compare the following sets of sentences:

- (a) 姐姐进城去买东西了。 **jiějie jìnchéng qù mǎi dōngxi le**
(lit. elder sister enter town go buy things *le*)

姐姐进城买东西去了。 **jiějie jìnchéng mǎi dōngxi qù le**
(lit. elder sister enter town buy things go *le*)

姐姐进城去买东西去了。 **jiějie jìnchéng qù mǎi dōngxi qù le**
(lit. elder sister enter town go buy things go *le*)
which all mean ‘Elder sister has gone shopping in town’.

- (b) 我明天上剑桥去赴约。 **wǒ míngtiān shàng jiànqiáo qù fùyuē**
(lit. I tomorrow cv: to Cambridge go keep appointment)

我明天上剑桥赴约去。 **wǒ míngtiān shàng jiànqiáo fùyuē qù**
(lit. I tomorrow cv: to Cambridge keep appointment go)

我明天上剑桥去赴约去。
wǒ míngtiān shàng jiànqiáo qù fùyuē qù
(lit. I tomorrow cv: to Cambridge go keep appointment go)

which all translate as ‘I am going for an appointment in Cambridge tomorrow’. Here are some more colloquial examples using 来 *lái* ‘to come’ or 去 *qù* ‘to go’:

大家快来看。 **dàjiā kuài lái kàn**
(lit. everyone quick come look)
Everyone come and have a look straight away.

你来帮帮忙。 **nǐ lái bāngbāng máng**
(lit. you come help-help busy) Come and give me a hand.

爸爸。你来出主意。 **bàba | nǐ lái chūchū zhǔyi**
(lit. father, you come express-express opinion)
Dad, come and tell us what you think (about it).

你去歇歇吧。 **nǐ qù xiēxiē ba**
(lit. you go rest-rest *ba*) Go and have a rest.

我们贺喜来了。 **wǒmen hèxǐ lái le**
(lit. we congratulate-come *le*) We’ve come to say congratulations.

他来看我来了。**tā lái kàn wǒ lái le**
(lit. he come see me come **le**) He came to see me.

我去找他去。**wǒ qù zhǎo tā qù**
(lit. I go seek him go) I'll go and look for him.

However, when 来 **lái** 'to come' or 去 **qù** 'to go' occur with verbs that have an inherent meaning of direction, they can only follow these verbs:

妈妈进城去了。**māma jìnchéng qù le**
(lit. mother enter town go **le**) Mother has gone into town.

爸爸回家来了。**bàba huíjiā lái le**
(lit. father return home come **le**) Father has come home.

姐姐出门去了。**jiějie chūmén qù le**
(lit. elder sister exit door go **le**) Elder sister is away.

The following would not normally be acceptable:

*妈妈去进城了。***māma qù jìnchéng le**

*爸爸来回家了。***bàba lái huíjiā le**

*姐姐去出门了。***jiějie qù chūmén le**

There are some explicit indicators of purpose such as 以 **yǐ** 'so as to', 免得 **miǎndé** 'to avoid':²

他在那几个字下面画了一条红线，以引起读者的注意。
tā zài nà jǐ ge zì xiàmiàn huà le yī tiáo hóngxiàn | yǐ yǐnqǐ
dúzhě de zhùyì
(lit. he cv:at those few mw characters-below draw **le** one mw:line red line, so as to attract readers' attention)

² Note that 为了 **wèile** 'in order to' never introduces a second-verb phrase, but is always placed at the beginning of a sentence: e.g. 为了不让妈妈知道，她撒了一个谎。 **wèile bù ràng māma zhīdao | tā sā le yī ge huǎng**, 'In order not to let mother know (what has happened), she told a lie'.

He put a red line under those characters (so as) to attract the readers' attention.

请你到了之后，马上打个电话来，免得大家记挂。
qǐng nǐ dào le zhīhòu | mǎshàng dǎ ge diànhuà lái | miǎndé
dàjiā jìguà

(lit. please you arrive **le** after, immediately make mw telephone call come, to avoid everyone be concerned)

Please phone immediately you arrive to avoid everyone getting worried.

请把盖子拧紧，以免里面的饼干受潮。

qǐng bǎ gàizi nǐng jǐn | yǐmiǎn lǐmiàn de bǐnggān shòucháo

(lit. please cv:grasping lid twist tight, to avoid inside **de** biscuits receive damp)

Please fasten the lid tight to stop the biscuits inside getting damp.

When one verb simply follows another, the action and purpose relationship between them tends to be more implicit than explicit, in contrast with the more explicit relationship when 来 **lái** or 去 **qù** or indicators like 以 **yǐ** or 免得 **miǎndé** are present:

大家一起鼓掌表示欢迎。

dàjiā yīqǐ gǔzhǎng biǎoshì huānyíng

(lit. everyone together applaud show welcome)

Everyone applauded in welcome.

我请了几天假回家探望我父母。

wǒ qǐng le jǐ tiān jià huíjiā tànwàng wǒ fùmǔ

(lit. I request **le** few days holiday return home visit my parents)

I requested a few days' leave to visit my parents.

他坐在河边钓鱼。

tā zuò zài hébiān diàoyú

(lit. he sit cv:at riverside fish fish) He sat fishing on the river bank.

我在客厅里腾出个地方放钢琴。

wǒ zài kètīng lǐ téngchū ge dìfang fàng gāngqín

(lit. I cv:at drawing-room-inside clear out mw place put piano)

I cleared a space in the drawing-room for a piano.

孩子站在秋千上来回悠荡。

háizi zhàn zài qiūqiān shàng láihuí yōudàng

(lit. child stand cv:on swing-top to and fro swing)

The child stood swinging back and forth on the swing.

他走累了，坐下来休息休息。

tā zǒu lèi le | zuò xiàlai xiūxi xiūxi

(lit. he walk tired **le**, sit down-come rest-rest)

He was tired with walking and sat down for a rest.

她闭上眼睛养养神。

tā bì shàng yǎnjīng yǎngyǎng shén

(lit. she close-up eyes repose-repose spirit)

She closed her eyes in relaxation.

To indicate briefness or casualness, the verb of purpose may be repeated as in the last two examples above. Similarly, in making suggestions or requests, the purpose verb is often reduplicated³ to convey a feeling of tentativeness:

我们找个安静的地方好好地聊一聊。

wǒmen zhǎo ge ānjìng de dìfang hǎohǎo de liáo yī liáo

(lit. we find mw quiet **de** place well-well **de** chat-one-chat)

Let's find a quiet place to have a good chat.

请把窗户打开透透气。

qǐng bǎ chuānghu dǎkāi tòutòu qì

(lit. please cv:grasping window thrust-open let in-let in air)

Please open the window to let in some air.

讲个笑话给大家听听吧。

jiǎng ge xiàohuà gěi dàjiā tīngtīng ba

(lit. tell mw joke cv:for everyone hear-hear **ba**)

Tell a joke for everyone to hear.

咱们聚在一起商量商量。

zánmen jù zài yīqǐ shāngliang shāngliang

(lit. we gather cv:at together discuss-discuss)

Let's get together for a discussion.

³ In any instance of reduplication, where the verb reduplicated is a monosyllabic verb, there are two possible formulations: VV or V 一 V, e.g. 看看 **kànkàn** or 看一看 **kàn yī kàn** 'to have a look'; if the verb is disyllabic and has an internal juxtapositional structure (i.e. VV), the reduplication can be only VV VV and the insertion of 一 **yī** is not possible, e.g. 学习学习 **xuéxí xuéxí** 'to learn from' and not *学习一学习 ***xuéxí yī xuéxí**; if it is a disyllabic verb with an internal 'verb + object' structure, only the verb is reduplicated and not the object, e.g. 散步 **sànbù** 'to take a walk' > 散散步 **sànsàn bù** or 散一散步 **sàn yī sàn bù** and not *散步散步 ***sànbù sànbù**.

To emphasise this tentativeness, a reduplicated main verb is often followed by the monosyllabic 看 **kàn** 'to see what happens':

你先试试看。 **nǐ xiān shìshì kàn**

(lit. you first try-try to see what happens) (You) have a try first.

你尝尝看。 **nǐ chángcháng kàn**

(lit. you taste-taste to see what happens) Have a taste.

穿穿看。 **chuānchuān kàn**

(lit. put on-put on and see what happens) Try it on.

Sometimes the purpose is expressed succinctly with a monosyllabic verb, single or reduplicated, which more often than not shares the object of the previous verb:

哥哥倒了杯茶喝。 **gēge dào le bēi chá hē**

(lit. elder brother pour **le** (one) cup tea drink)

Elder brother poured out a cup of tea to drink.

妹妹要出席舞会，向姐姐借了一条裙子穿。

mèimei yào chūxí wǔhuì | xiàng jiějie jiè le yī tiáo qúnzi chuān

(lit. younger sister want attend dance, cv:from elder sister borrow **le** one mw skirt wear)

Younger sister wanted to go to a dance and borrowed a skirt to wear from her elder sister.

你去买份报纸瞧瞧。 **nǐ qù mǎi fèn bàozhǐ qiáoqiáo**

(lit. you go buy (one) mw newspaper look-look)

You go and buy a paper to have a look.

咱们租辆自行车骑骑。 **zánmen zū liàng zìxíngchē qíqí**

(lit. we hire (one) mw bicycle ride-ride)

Let's hire a bike to have a ride.

我可以搭下一班飞机走。 **wǒ kěyǐ dā xià yī bān fēijī zǒu**

(lit. I can take next one mw:flight plane leave)

I can go on the next flight.

14.3 The first verb indicating reason or cause

The first verb may state the reason why the action in the second verb should be or has been carried out:

人家正在睡觉，别去打搅。

rénjiā zhèngzài shuìjiào | bié qù dǎjiǎo

(lit. other people at-this-very-moment sleep, don't go disturb)

(S)he is just asleep, (so) don't disturb him/her.

我能见到您，感到十分荣幸。

wǒ néng jiàn dào nín | gǎndào shífēn róngxìng

(lit. I can see you [polite], feel extremely honoured)

I will be deeply honoured to meet you./I was deeply honoured to have met you.

水管坏了，射了他一身的水。

shuǐguǎn huài le | shè le tā yī shēn de shuǐ

(lit. waterpipe broke **le**, spurt **le** him one mw:body **de** water)

The (water)pipe burst and spurted water all over him.

行李没打好，都散开了。**xíngli méi dǎ hǎo | dōu sàn kāi le**

(lit. luggage not pack well, all scatter **le**)

The luggage was not fastened properly and everything spilled out.

花瓶掉在地上，摔破了。**huāpíng diào zài dì shàng | shuāi pò le**

(lit. flower-vase fall cv:on ground-top, fall-break **le**)

The vase fell on the floor/ground and broke.

他着了凉，病了几天。**tā zháo le liáng | bìng le jǐ tiān**

(lit. he catch **le** cold, sick **le** few days)

He caught a cold and was sick/ill for a few days.

老张说了个笑话，把大家都逗乐了。

lǎozhāng shuō le ge xiàohuà | bǎ dàjiā dōu dòulè le

(lit. old Zhang tell **le** (one) mw joke, cv:grasping everyone all amuse-happy **le**)

Old Zhang told a joke and amused everyone.

The first-verb phrase can be an adjective or adjectival expression:

孩子太小，还怕生。**háizi tài xiǎo | hái pà shēng**

(lit. child too small, still afraid stranger)

The child was very small and still shy with strangers.

她的脾气好，很容易跟人相处。

tāde píqi hǎo | hěn róngyì gēn rén xiāngchǔ

(lit. her temper good, very easy cv:with people get along)

She is good-tempered/has a pleasant disposition and gets on well with people.

Explanations or causes (or their lack) are expressed by an opening verb phrase consisting of 有 **yǒu** ‘to have’ (or 没有 **méiyǒu** ‘to have not’) and a noun. In many cases, the noun is abstract, like 理由 **lǐyóu** ‘reason’, 责任 **zérèn** ‘responsibility’, 权力 **quánlì** ‘power or authority’, 资格 **zīgé** ‘qualification’.

你没有理由怀疑他的动机。**nǐ méiyǒu lǐyóu huáiyí tāde dòngjī**

(lit. you don’t have reason doubt his motive)

You have no reason to question his motive.

世界各国都有责任反对恐怖主义。

shìjiè gè guó dōu yǒu zérèn fǎnduì kǒngbù zhǔyì

(lit. world every country all have responsibility oppose terrorism)

All the countries in the world have a responsibility to fight terrorism.

老师有病请两天假。lǎoshī yǒu bìng qǐng liǎng tiān jià
(lit. teacher has illness request two days leave)
The teacher is ill and asks for two days' leave.

秘书有事不能来上班。mìshū yǒu shì bù néng lái shàngbān
(lit. secretary has business not able come work)
The secretary has something on and can't come to work.

你有信心写好这篇文章吗?
nǐ yǒu xìnxīn xiě hǎo zhèi piān wénzhāng ma
(lit. you have confidence write-well this mw essay *ma*)
Do you have the confidence to write this essay?

她有没有勇气克服这个困难?
tā yǒu méiyǒu yǒngqì kèfú zhèi ge kùnnan
(lit. she has-not-has courage overcome this mw difficulty)
Does she have the courage to overcome this difficulty?

他没有能力帮助你们。tā méiyǒu nénglì bāngzhù nǐmen
(lit. he not have ability help you)
He doesn't have the ability to help you.

你没有必要去跟他们纠缠。
nǐ méiyǒu bìyào qù gēn tāmen jiūchán
(lit. you not have necessity go cv:with them bicker)
There's no need for you to go and bicker with them.

我实在没有时间来考虑这个问题。
wǒ shízài méiyǒu shíjiān lái kǎolǚ zhèi ge wèntí
(lit. I in fact not have time come consider this mw problem)
I really don't have time to think about this problem.

Other abstract nouns that can collocate with 有 yǒu (or 没有 méiyǒu) include: 办法 bànfǎ 'resource', 本事 běnshì 'ability', 力量 lìliàng 'strength', 把握 bǎwò 'certainty', 机会 jīhuì 'opportunity', 条件 tiáojiàn 'condition', 可能 kěnéng 'possibility'.

14.4 The first verb expressing accompanying manner or circumstances

The accompanying manner or circumstances of an action, which is usually conveyed by a participial phrase in English, is commonly expressed in Chinese by a verbal phrase with the manner indicator 着 zhe attached to

the verb. A verbal phrase like this always comes before the main verb. For example:

她笑着跟我谈了几句。 **tā xiàozhe gēn wǒ tán le jǐ jù**

(lit. she laugh **zhe** cv:with me talk **le** few sentences)

Smiling, she had a few words with me.

他怀着满腔的热情接受了这个任务。

tā huàizhe mǎnqiāng de rèqíng jiēshòu le zhèi ge rènwu

(lit. he embrace **zhe** full breast **de** enthusiasm accept **le** this mw task)

He took on this job filled with enthusiasm.

我带着所有的文件去见律师。

wǒ dàizhe suǒyǒu de wénjiàn qù jiàn lǚshī

(lit. I carry **zhe** all documents go see lawyer)

I went to see the lawyer, taking all the documents.

母亲哼着歌儿哄孩子睡觉。

mǔqīn hēngzhe gēr hǒng háizi shuìjiào

(lit. mother hum **zhe** tune/song coax child sleep)

Mother humming a tune, coaxed the child to sleep.

孩子们扒着窗台看游行队伍。

háizimen bāzhe chuāngtái kàn yóuxíng duìwu

(lit. children hold **zhe** window-sill watch parade procession)

The children watched the parade leaning on the window-sill.

他抄着手站在一边看热闹。

tā chāo zhe shǒu zhàn zài yībiān kàn rènao

(lit. he fold **zhe** arms stand cv: at one side watch excitement)

Standing to one side with arms folded, he watched the excitement.

两个小学生跳着跑过来。

liǎng ge xiǎo xuésheng tiào zhe pǎo guòlai

(lit. two mw primary school pupils jump **zhe** run across-come)

Two primary schoolchildren came jumping across.

两个中国老师争着付钱。

liǎng ge zhōngguó lǎoshī zhēng zhe fù qián

(lit. two mw Chinese teachers vie **zhe** pay money)

The two Chinese teachers vied (with each other) to pay.

小李红着脸说了几句。 **xiǎolǐ hóng zhe liǎn shuō le jǐ jù**

(lit. little Li red **zhe** face say **le** few sentences)

Little Li with a red face said a few words.

别背着人说别人的坏话。

bié bèi zhe rén shuō biérén de huàihuà

(lit. don't behind-back **zhe** someone speak other person **de** unpleasant talk)

Don't talk ill of someone behind his/her back.

A 着 **zhe** phrase with a monosyllabic verb may be reduplicated to indicate repetitiveness. A phrase like this may be placed after the subject or at the beginning of the sentence before the subject:

我们说着说着已经走到了湖边。

wǒmen shuō zhe shuō zhe yǐjīng zǒu dào le húbiān

(lit. we talk **zhe** talk **zhe** already walk cv:arriving at **le** lake side)

or:

说着说着我们已经走到了湖边。

shuō zhe shuō zhe wǒmen yǐjīng zǒu dào le húbiān

(lit. talk **zhe** talk **zhe** we already walk cv:arriving at **le** lakeside)

Talking endlessly, we had already arrived at the lakeside.

哭着哭着她晕了过去。 **kū zhe kū zhe tā yūn le guòqu**

(lit. weep **zhe** weep **zhe** she faint le pass-go)

She wept and wept until she fainted.

他们吵着吵着打起架来。

tāmen chǎo zhe chǎo zhe dǎ qǐ jià lai

(lit. they argue **zhe** argue **zhe** fight begin-come)

They argued and argued until they began to fight.

Accompanying actions in some cases do not need 着 **zhe** if there are verbal complements with balanced rhythm. For example:

护士放轻脚步屏住气走近病人床前。

hùshi fàng qīng jiǎobù bǐng zhù qì zǒu jìn bìngrén chuáng qián

(lit. nurse place light footstep hold-fix breath walk near patient bed-front)

The nurse, with light steps and holding her/his breath, approached the patient's bed.

compare:

护士踮着脚屏着呼吸走近病人床前。

hùshi diǎn zhe jiǎo bǐng zhe hūxī zǒu jìn bìngrén chuáng qián

(lit. nurse tip-toe **zhe** hold **zhe** breath walk near patient bed-front)

The nurse, on tiptoe and holding his/her breath, approached the patient's bed.

14.5 Consecutive actions

A sentence expressing consecutive action regularly takes the form in Chinese of a completed action verb phrase or its negative alternative followed by the most commonly used referential adverbs 就⁴ *jiù* ‘then’ or 才 *cái* ‘only then’ before the main verb:

他下了课就回家去了。 **tā xià le kè jiù huíjiā qù le**

(lit. he finish *le* class, then return home go *le*)

He went home when class was finished.

客人进了门就把鞋脱下来。

kèren jìn le mén jiù bǎ xié tuō xiàlai

(lit. guests enter *le* door then cv:grasping shoes take-off down-come)

The guests took off their shoes when they came in.

哥哥吃了饭才开始复习功课。

gēge chī le fàn cái kāishǐ fùxí gōngkè

(lit. elder brother eat *le* food, only then begin revise schoolwork)

Elder brother didn't begin to revise his schoolwork until he had eaten.

我没有吃饭就去打网球了。

wǒ méiyǒu chīfàn jiù qù dǎ wǎngqiú le

(lit. I not have eat food then go play tennis *le*)

Without eating, I went to play tennis.

⁴ 便 *biàn* ‘then, as soon as’ is used as an alternative to 就 *jiù*, particularly in written style.

A series of completed action verbs may precede the main verb:

他洗了脸，刷了牙，脱了衣服，就上床睡觉去了。

**tā xǐ le liǎn | shuā le yá | tuō le yīfu | jiù shàng chuáng
shuìjiào qù le**

(lit. he wash *le* face, brush *le* teeth, take-off *le* clothes, then get on
bed sleep go *le*)

After washing his face, brushing his teeth and undressing, he went to bed.

他戴上眼镜，拿起书本，翻到第三页，便大声朗诵起来。

**tā dài shàng yǎnjìng | nàqǐ shūběn | fān dào dì sān yè | biàn
dàshēng lǎngsòng qǐlai**

(lit. he put on spectacles, pick up book, turn cv:to third page, then
loud voice read aloud begin)

After putting on his glasses, picking up the book and turning to page three, he began to read it out in a loud voice.

In making requests and suggestions relating naturally to projected rather than completed action, the referential adverb 再 *zài* 'only then' is often used to mark consecutive sequence to the final verb:

这个问题咱们好好地研究研究再说。

zhèi ge wèntí zánmen hǎohǎo de yánjiū yánjiū zài shuō

(lit. this mw question we well-well **de** study-study then talk)

Let's give this question some thought before we talk further.

这件事搁一搁再办吧。

zhèi jiàn shì gē yī gē zài bàn ba

(lit. this mw matter put aside-one-put aside then deal with **ba**)

Let's put this matter aside for a while before we deal with it.

茶刚泡上，闷一会儿再喝。

chá gāng pào shàng | mēn yīhuìr zài hē

(lit. tea just made, brew a while then drink)

The tea is just made. Let it brew for a moment before (you)
drink it.

请你等一等再走。**qǐng nǐ děng yī děng zài zǒu**

(lit. please you wait-one-wait then leave)

Please wait a bit before you go.

我先给你垫上，等你取了款再还我。

wǒ xiān gěi nǐ diàn shàng | děng nǐ qǔ le kuǎn zài huán wǒ

(lit. I first cv:for you advance (money), wait you draw **le** money
(from bank) then return me)

I will give you an advance, and you can pay me back when you draw
money out (of the bank).

A consecutive sequence of actions may also include a coverbal or 着 *zhe* phrase or both before the final verb, with or without a referential adverb:

他扭过头来冲我笑了笑。V + CoV + V

tā niǔ guò tóu lái chòng wǒ xiào le xiào

(lit. he twist-over head come, cv:towards me, laugh **le** laugh)

He turned (his head) round and gave a smile in my direction.

他抽出一支香烟凑着鼻子闻了闻。V + Vzhe + V

tā chōuchū yī zhī xiāngyān còu zhe bízi wén le wén

(lit. he take out one mw cigarette, press-close **zhe** nose smell **le**
smell)

He took out a cigarette, held it close to his nose and smelled it.

她用两手支着头在想什么? CoV + Vzhe + V

tā yòng liǎng shǒu zhī zhe tóu zài xiǎng shénme

(lit. she cv:using two hands support **zhe** head thinking what)

What is she thinking about, holding her head in her hands?

外宾学着用筷子吃饭。 Vzhe + CoV + V

wàibīn xué zhe yòng kuàizi chīfàn

(lit. foreign guests learn **zhe** cv:using chopsticks eat food)

The foreign visitors are learning to eat with chopsticks.

老爷爷停了一下，皱了皱眉头，又接着往下说。

V + V + refA + Vzhe + CoV + V

lǎo yéye tíng le yīxià | zhòu le zhòu méitóu | yòu jiēzhe wǎng xià shuō

(lit. grandpa stop **le** one moment, furrow **le** furrow brow, then again continue **zhe** cv:going ahead speak)

Grandpa stopped for a moment, frowned, and then continued speaking.

Two consecutive actions may of course be carried out by the same person or by two different people. If one action follows the other very quickly, the two verbs are often linked by a pair of referential adverbs 一 *yī* ... 就 *jiù* 'as soon as' placed respectively before them. For example:

老师一走进教室，就拿出点名簿点名。

lǎoshī yī zǒu jìn jiàoshì | jiù ná chū diǎnmíngbù diǎnmíng

(lit. teacher once walk-into classroom, then take out register call roll)

As soon as the teacher came into the classroom, (s)he took out the register to do the roll-call.

校长一走进礼堂，大家就安静下来。

xiàozhǎng yī zǒu jìn lǐtáng | dàjiā jiù ānjìng xiàlai

(lit. head teacher once walk-into auditorium, everyone then quiet down-come)

As soon as the head teacher entered the auditorium, everyone went quiet.

比赛一开始，利兹联队就进了一球。

bǐsài yī kāishǐ | lìzī liánduì jiù jìn le yī qiú

(lit. game once begin, Leeds United then enter **le** one ball)

As soon as the game started, Leeds United scored a goal.

太阳一出来，鸟儿就在树上叽叽喳喳地叫起来。

tàiyáng yī chūlai | niǎor jiù zài shù shàng jījīzhāzhā de jiào qǐlai

(lit. sun once out-come, birds then cv:at tree-top chirp-chirp **de** call-begin)

As soon as the sun came out, the birds in the trees began to chatter.

爸爸一进门就把鞋脱掉，把大衣挂在衣架上。

bàba yī jìn mén jiù bǎ xié tuōdiào | bǎ dà yī guà zài yījià shàng
(lit. father once enter door then cv:grasping shoes take off, cv:grasping overcoat hang cv:at clothes stand-top)

As soon as father comes in, he takes off his shoes and hangs up his overcoat.

弟弟一放下刀叉就跑去看电视。

didi yī fàng xià dāochā jiù pǎo qù kàn diànshì

(lit. younger brother once put down knife fork then run-go watch television)

As soon as younger brother puts down his knife and fork, he rushes off to watch television.

14.6 Simultaneous actions

Simultaneous actions are linked by a pair of adverbials 一边 *yībiān* ... 一边 *yībiān* ‘while; whilst; at the same time’,⁵ which are placed respectively before the two verbs. For example:

他一边看书，一边听音乐。

tā yībiān kàn shū | yībiān tīng yīnyuè

(lit. he one-side read book, one-side listen to music)

He was reading and listening to music (at the same time).

售货员一边跟我谈话，一边把我买的东西包好。

shòuhuòyuán yībiān gēn wǒ tánhuà | yībiān bǎ wǒ mǎi de dōngxi bāo hǎo

(lit shop-assistant one-side cv:with me chat, one-side cv:grasping I bought *de* things wrap well)

The shop assistant chatted to me as (s)he wrapped up the things I had bought.

⁵ 一面 *yīmiàn* ... 一面 *yīmiàn* ‘at the same time’ are used in the same way but more by southern speakers.

14.7 An emphatic chain construction

An idiomatic and emphatic chain construction can be formulated by using in sequence two verbs with contrasting meanings, one in the affirmative and the other in the negative. Generally, the affirmative verb comes first:

她拽住他不放。 **tā zhuài zhù tā bù fàng**

(lit. she hold-firm him not let go)

She caught hold of him and would not let him go.

你坐着别动! **nǐ zuò zhe bié dòng**

(lit. you sit **zhe** don't move)

You sit (where you are) and don't move.

小孙丢下工作不管。

xiǎosūn diū xià gōngzuò bù guǎn

(lit. little Sun throw-down work not care)

Little Sun abandoned the work and didn't bother about it.

老李板起脸孔不笑。 **lǎolǐ bǎnqǐ liǎnkǒng bù xiào**

(lit. old Li made serious face not smile)

Old Li gave a stern look and didn't smile.

孩子看到橱窗里的玩具，赖着不肯走。

háizi kàn dào chúchuāng lǐ de wánjù | lài zhe bùkěn zǒu

(lit. child see shop-window-inside de toys, drag on **zhe** not willing leave)

Seeing the toys in the shop window, the child hung back and would not move.

你怎么能撂下这件事儿不办呢?

nǐ zénme néng liào xià zhèi jiàn shìr bù bàn ne

(lit. you how able put down this mw matter not deal with **ne**)

How can you put down this work and not deal with it?

The follow-up negatives in the above examples all indicate intentional actions. If the negative is an expression of something unintentional, it may take the form of a potential complement⁶ instead:

邮票已经粘住了，撕不下来。

yóupiào yǐjīng zhān zhù le | sībuxiàlai

(lit. stamp already stick-firm **le**, tear not off-come)

The stamps have already stuck (to the envelope) and cannot be taken off.

我饱了，一点儿也吃不下了。

wǒ bǎo le | yīdiǎnr yě chībuxià le

(lit. I full **le**, one bit even eat not down **le**)

I'm full and I can't eat a bit more.

⁶ A potential complement (see §10.2) tends to imply that the ability (or inability) to carry out the action is beyond the control of the speaker.

14.8 An articulated chain construction⁷

⁷ See Chapter 25 on abbreviation.

It is extremely common in Chinese to use the object of a first verb to be the subject of a following verb without having to reiterate the nominal or pronominal item, the formula being:

N1 + V1 + N2, V2 (+ N3, V3) ...

我说‘大家’自然包括你在内。

wǒ shuō ‘dàjiā’ zìrán bāokuò nǐ zàinèi

(lit. I say ‘everyone’ naturally include you within)

When I say everyone, I naturally include you.

你掂一掂这条鱼有多重？

nǐ diān yī diān zhèi tiào yú yǒu duō zhòng

(lit. you weigh-one-weigh (in your hand) this mw fish have how heavy)

Weigh this fish in your hand (and see how heavy it is).

那天我在公园里遇见他，在一旁看着他六岁的小女儿，
从滑梯上滑下来。

**nèi tiān wǒ zài gōngyuán lǐ yùjiàn tā | zài yīpáng kànzhe tā liù
suì de xiǎo nǚ’ér | cóng huátī shàng huá xiàlai**

(lit. that day I cv:at park-inside met him, cv:at one side watch **zhe**
his 6-years-old **de** little daughter, cv:from slide-top slide
down-come)

That day I bumped into him in the park as he was watching his little
6-year-old daughter sliding down a slide.

他在报上发表了一篇文章，攻击那些官僚主义者，只看所谓调查
报告，不顾事实真相。

**tā zài bào shàng fābiǎo le yī piān wénzhāng | gōngjī nèi xiē
guānliáozhǔyìzhě | zhǐ kàn suǒwèi diàochá bàogào | bùgù
shìshí zhēnxiàng**

(lit. he cv:in newspaper-on publish **le** one mw article, attack those
bureaucrats, only read so-called findings report, not care
facts truth)

He published an article in the paper, attacking those bureaucrats who
read only reports of findings and pay no attention to the real state
of affairs.

我最喜欢吃古老肉，又甜又酸，容易送饭。

wǒ zuì xǐhuan chī gǔlǎoròu | yòu tián yòu suān | róngyì sòng fàn

(lit. I most like eat 'gulao' meat, both sweet and sour, easy goes with rice)

I like 'gulao' pork because it's sweet and sour and goes well with rice.

As we can see from the last example, a predicate having the object of a preceding verb as its notional subject may be either verbal or adjectival.

Chapter 15

The verb 是 shì

是 shì ‘to be’ is a versatile verb, which is used for a variety of purposes. One is similar to the verb ‘to be’ in English to introduce an explanatory predicative. However, 是 shì is a very different verb from the English link verb, and in the following sections, its various uses will be spelled out. By definition, all sentences with 是 shì are expository in nature.

15.1 是 shì introducing a predicative

是 shì ‘to be’ introduces a predicative, which generally takes the form of a nominal or pronominal. This predicative serves as an explanatory equivalent to the topic under discussion. In other words, 是 shì equates the two items on either side of it. For example:

我弟弟是中学生。wǒ dìdì shì zhōng xuésheng

My younger brother is a secondary school student.

我是大学生。wǒ shì dà xuésheng

I am a university student.

她是我们的邻居。tā shì wǒmende línjū

She is our neighbour.

他是谁？tā shì shéi

Who is he?

这是泰山。zhè shì tàishān

This is Mount Tai.

Verbs functioning in a similar equative way include: 姓 xìng ‘to have the surname of . . .’, 叫 jiào ‘to have the name of . . .’, 象 xiàng ‘to resemble’. For example, 他姓李 tā xìng lǐ ‘His surname is Li’; 她象她母亲 tā xiàng tā mǔqīn ‘She looks like her mother’.

One salient feature of the equation is that the nominal or pronominal expression on the right-hand side tends to be more general (i.e. less specific) in reference or meaning than that on the left-hand side. One cannot say, for example,

*中学生是我弟弟。 **zhōng xuésheng shì wǒ dìdì**

*A secondary school student is my younger brother.

*大学生是我。 **dà xuésheng shì wǒ**

*A university student is I.

*我们的邻居是她。 **wǒmen de línjū shì tā**

*Our neighbour is she.

*谁是他? **shéi shì tā**

*Who is he?

However, it is possible for the words or expressions on either side of the equation to be equally specific and for them to be of a nominal nature. In these cases, they are generally reversible without any significant change in the meaning:

王老师是我们的语法老师。

wáng lǎoshī shì wǒmen de yǔfǎ lǎoshī

Mr Wang is our grammar teacher.

我们的语法老师是王老师。

wǒmen de yǔfǎ lǎoshī shì wáng lǎoshī

Our grammar teacher is Mr Wang.

李明是我的男朋友。

lǐ míng shì wǒde nán péngyou

Li Ming is my boyfriend.

我的男朋友是李明。

wǒde nán péngyou shì lǐ míng

My boyfriend is Li Ming.

If one item is pronominal, then it is generally placed on the left-hand side, while the nominal item for explanation is placed on the right-hand side. This is because pronominal items generally indicate given information, which is then posed as the topic:

这是泰山。

zhè shì tàishān

This is Mount Tai.

他是李明。

tā shì lǐ míng

He is Li Ming.

One does not say:

- | | | |
|--------|------------------------|---------------------|
| *泰山是这。 | tàishān shì zhè | *Mount Tai is this. |
| *李明是他。 | lǐ míng shì tā | *Li Ming is he. |

The predicative may also take the form of a 的 *de* expression attached to a pronoun, adjective, verb or subject-predicate clause. For example,

- (a) pronoun + 的 *de* as predicative:

这件羊毛衫是我的。 **zhèi jiàn yángmáoshān shì wǒ de**
This woollen sweater is mine.

- (b) adjective + 的 *de* as predicative:

玫瑰花是最美的。 **méiguī huā shì zuì měi de**
The roses are the most beautiful flowers.

- (c) verb expression + 的 *de* as predicative:

我弟弟是学汉语的。 **wǒ dìdì shì xué hànǔ de**
My younger brother studies Chinese.

- (d) clause + 的 *de* as predicative:

这些礼物是我送给你的。 **zhèxiē lǐwù shì wǒ sòng gěi nǐ de**
These are presents for you from me./These are presents I am giving to you.

The two sides of such an equation can often be reversed, without any change in the overall meaning of the sentence, although there is some shift in focus. For example:

- (a) pronoun + 的 *de* as topic:

我的是羊毛衫。
wǒ de shì yángmáoshān
Mine is a woollen sweater.

- (b) adjective + 的 *de* as topic:

最美的是玫瑰花。
zuì měi de shì méiguī huā
The most beautiful are roses.

- (c) verb + 的 *de* as topic:

学翻译的是高年级学生。
xué fānyì de shì gāo niánjí xuésheng
Those who study translation are upper-year students.

(d) clause + 的 *de* as topic:

我叫的是大虾。

wǒ jiào de shì dàxiā

What I have ordered are prawns.

的 *de* expressions may, of course, occupy both sides of the equation:

我叫的是我最喜欢的。

wǒ jiào de shì wǒ zuì xǐhuan de

What I have ordered is what I like most.

你的是蓝的，我的是红的。

nǐ de shì lán de, wǒ de shì hóng de

Yours is blue, mine is red.

An interesting footnote to this section is perhaps the extensive use of 的 *de* expressions as topics with 是 **shì** predicatives where English would more normally have adverbials (e.g. fortunately, unfortunately, more importantly, strangely enough, etc.). The predicatives under such circumstances have to be in the form of clauses. For example:

幸运的是那天没有下雨。

xìngyùn de | shì | nàitiān méiyǒu xià yǔ

Fortunately, it did not rain that day./What was fortunate was that it did not rain that day.

倒霉的是我不会开车。

dǎoméi de | shì | wǒ bù huì kāichē

Unfortunately, I do not know how to drive./What is unfortunate is that I do not know how to drive.

奇怪的是大家都不赞成。

qíguái de | shì | dàjiā dōu bù zàchéng

Strangely enough, nobody agreed./What was strange was that nobody agreed.

更重要的是态度要认真。

gèng zhòngyào de | shì | tàidù yào rènzhēn

More importantly, one must adopt a conscientious attitude./What is more important is that one's attitude must be conscientious.

Apart from introducing explanatory/expository predicatives, 是 **shì** 'to be' may, of course, also be used to introduce evaluative predicatives with adjectival expressions that incorporate degree adverbs such as 多么 **duōme** 'to an immeasurable extent', 那么 **nàme** 'to that degree'. Sometimes,

exclamatory particles such as 啊 ā, 呀 ya, etc. occur at the end of such sentences. For example:

他的诗是多么奔放啊! **tā de shī shì duōme bēnfàng a**

(lit. his poems are how unrestrained a)

How unrestrained his poems are!

女主人是那么热情。 **nǚ zhǔrén shì nàme rèqíng**

The hostess is so cordial and friendly.

This use of 是 shì as a predicative introducer may be modified by an adverb. For example,

这件羊毛衫好象是我的。

¹ **zhèi jiàn yángmáoshān hǎoxiàng shì wǒ de**

This woollen sweater seems to be mine.

女主人总是那么热情。

nǚ zhǔrén zǒng shì nàme rèqíng

The hostess is always so cordial and friendly.

¹ Please note that 好象 hǎoxiàng 'likely' is used here as an adverb.

15.2 Predicatives with an optional 是 shì

If the predicative is an item that indicates time, date, age, height, weight, etc., 是 shì is often omitted. For example:

现在(是)几点钟? **xiànzài (shì) jǐ diǎn zhōng**

What time is it now?

今天(是)十月二号。 **jīntiān (shì) shí yuè èr hào**

Today is 2 October.

这个孩子今年(是)五岁。 **zhèi ge hái zi jīnnián (shì) wǔ suì**

The child is 5 years old.

小李(是)一米七。 **xiǎolǐ (shì) yī mǐ qī**

Little Li is 1 metre and 7 centimetres tall.

是 shì cannot, of course, be omitted from the negative forms of these sentences:

今天不是十月二号。 **jīntiān bù shì shí yuè èr hào**

Today is not 2 October.

现在不是五点钟。 **xiànzài bù shì wǔ diǎn zhōng**

It is not five o'clock now.

Arithmetical conversion within the same system from a bigger unit to a smaller unit more often than not results in an equation without 是 **shì**:

一年(是)十二个月。 **yī nián (shì) shí'èr ge yuè**

There are twelve months in a year.

一天(是)二十四小时。 **yī tiān (shì) èrshí sì xiǎoshí**

There are twenty-four hours in a day.

However, if the conversion takes place between different systems, 是 **shì** cannot be omitted:

一吨是一千公斤。 **yī dūn shì yī qiān gōngjīn**

A tonne is equal to one thousand kilograms.

一米是多少英尺? **yī mǐ shì duōshǎo yīngchǐ**

How many feet are there in a metre?

When asking or talking about the cost or price of something, omission of 是 **shì** is the standard form, and the order of the equation is generally reversible:

一本多少钱? **yī běn duōshǎo qián**

or:

多少钱一本? **duōshǎo qián yī běn**

How much per copy?

一盒五十便士。 **yī hé wǔshí biànshì**

or:

五十便士一盒。 **wǔshí biànshì yī hé**

Fifty pence for a box.

There is, of course, a set of verbs that express measurements more specifically:

这条绳子长二十米。 **zhèi tiáo shéngzi cháng èrshí mǐ**

(lit. this mw rope is long 20 metres)

This rope is 20 metres long.

那栋房子值一百万元。 **nèi dòng fángzi zhí yī bǎiwàn yuán**

(lit. that mw house is worth one million **yuán**)

That house is worth a million yuan.

Other verbs in this category are: 高 **gāo** 'to have the height of...', 重 **zhòng** 'to have the weight of...', 卖 **mài** 'to sell for ...', 等于 **děngyú** 'to be equal to', 合 **hé** 'to be the same as'.

15.3 是 *shì* indicating existence

是 *shì* 'to be' may also be used to indicate existence, and in this case, it resembles 有 *yǒu* 'to have, there is/are'. However, the kind of existence expressed by 是 *shì*, in comparison with 有 *yǒu*, tends to be more permanent than incidental and to indicate the occupation of the whole specified area rather than part of it.

The structural formula for both 是 *shì* and 有 *yǒu* existential sentences is the same:

Time or location + 是 *shì* or 有 *yǒu* + item(s) that exist(s)

but their underlying meanings are different:

桌子上有书。 **zhuōzi shàng yǒu shū**

There are books on the table. (i.e. other things may be there too)

桌子上都是书。 **zhuōzi shàng dōu shì shū**

The whole table was covered with books. (i.e. the only things on the table are books)

Clearly, 有 *yǒu* seems to imply that the existence of an item or items in a particular place or time, from the speaker's perspective (i.e. as an onlooker), is probably more casual than intentional. The item or items happen to be there and the onlooker senses their presence. Nouns following 有 *yǒu* are therefore invariably of indefinite reference.

Because of this, 有 *yǒu* is more likely to be associated with multiple items or used for making queries:

冰箱里有鱼，有肉，有蔬菜，有水果。

bīngxiāng li yǒu yú, yǒu ròu, yǒu shūcài, yǒu shuǐguǒ

There are fish, meat, vegetables and fruit in the fridge.

屋子里有人吗？

wūzi li yǒu rén ma?

Is there anybody inside?

是 *shì* on the other hand implies that the existence of an object or objects in a particular place or time, from what can be seen or understood, is more deliberate than incidental. In other words, the impression seems to be that the item or items are there because of some design or plan or that they have apparently become the sole and dominating occupants of the location in question. That is what is there. This being the case, the noun

after 是 **shì** can have either definite or indefinite reference depending on the context:

The verb
是 **shì**

后边是诊所。 **hòubian shì zhěnsuǒ**

At the back is a/the clinic.

cf. 后边有诊所。 **hòubian yǒu zhěnsuǒ**

At the back there is a clinic.

大学对面是一家银行。

dàxué duìmiàn shì yī jiā yínháng

Opposite the university is a bank.

cf. 大学对面有一家银行。

dàxué duìmiàn yǒu yī jiā yínháng

There is a bank opposite the university.

楼上是三间卧室。

lóu shàng shì sān jiān wòshì

Upstairs are three bedrooms.

cf. 楼上有三间卧室。

lóu shàng yǒu sān jiān wòshì

There are three bedrooms upstairs.

是 **shì** is therefore often associated with a single category of items and commonly occurs with adverbs like 都 **dōu** ‘wholly’, 全 **quán** ‘completely’.

到处是人。

dàochù shì rén

There were people everywhere.

满地是水。

mǎndì shì shuǐ

There is water all over the ground.

屋子里都是烟。

wūzi lǐ dōu shì yān

The room was filled with smoke.

It is interesting to note that the idiom 有的是 **yǒude shì** ‘there’s plenty of...’, which employs both 有 **yǒu** and 是 **shì**, is used to indicate the profusion of a particular item in a place:

礼堂里还有座位吗?

lǐtáng lǐ hái yǒu zuòwèi ma

Are there any more vacant seats in the auditorium?

有的是。 **yǒu de shì**

Yes, there are plenty of them there.

礼堂里有的是座位。

lǐtáng lǐ yǒu de shì zuòwèi

There are plenty of seats in the auditorium.

冰箱里有的是冰激凌。

bīngxiāng lǐ yǒu de shì bīngjīlíng

There is plenty of ice-cream in the fridge.

15.4 是 *shì* expressing emphasis

Similar to cleft sentences in English (e.g. 'It was yesterday that we arrived'), 是 *shì* in Chinese is also used to express emphasis (with 的 *de* being present or not present depending on the situation), and it is placed in front of the word or phrase where emphasis is being sought. In other words, the word or phrase preceded by 是 *shì* will naturally receive sentence stress. We may call this kind of sentence stress pattern **confirmatory emphasis**. Let us look at the following narrative Chinese sentence that recounts something that has already happened:

我去年从美国坐飞机到英国去探望王先生。

**wǒ qùnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù tànwàng
wáng xiānsheng**

Last year I went by plane from America to Britain to visit
Mr Wang.

Different emphasis can be achieved in this sentence by placing 是 *shì* directly before the subject or any adverbial phrase coming before the main verb, with 的 *de* added at the end:²

是我去年从美国坐飞机到英国去探望王先生的。

**shì wǒ qùnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù tànwàng
wáng xiānsheng de**

[It was] I [who] last year went by plane from America to Britain to
visit Mr Wang.

我是去年从美国坐飞机到英国去探望王先生的。

**wǒ shì qùnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù tànwàng
wáng xiānsheng de**

[It was] **last year** [that] I went by plane from America to Britain to
visit Mr Wang.

我去年是从美国坐飞机到英国去探望王先生的。

**wǒ qùnián shì cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù tànwàng
wáng xiānsheng de**

It was **from America** that I went last year by plane to Britain to
visit Mr Wang.

² In spoken English, this kind of confirmatory emphasis may often be achieved by giving sentence stress to the word to be emphasised rather than by using a cleft structure. While sentence stress like this can be used in Chinese, emphasis with 是 *shì* is more common in Chinese than the cleft structure in English.

我去年从美国是坐飞机到英国去探望王先生的。

wǒ qùnián cóng měiguó shì zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù tànwàng wáng xiānsheng de

It was **by plane** that I went last year from America to Britain to visit Mr Wang.

我去年从美国坐飞机是到英国去探望王先生的。

wǒ qùnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī shì dào yīngguó qù tànwàng wáng xiānsheng de

It was **to Britain** that I went last year by plane from America to visit Mr Wang.

When the main predicate verb itself is to be emphasised, 是 shì is still placed before it, but 的 de will have to be shifted to a position in front of the object of the verb:³

我去年从美国坐飞机到英国是去探望的王先生。

wǒ qùnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó shì qù tànwàng de wáng xiānsheng

It was to go and visit Mr Wang that I flew last year from America to Britain.

or:

我去年从美国坐飞机到英国去是探望的王先生。

wǒ qùnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù shì tànwàng de wáng xiānsheng

It was to visit Mr Wang that I went last year by plane from America to Britain.

我去年从美国坐飞机到英国去探望的是王先生。

wǒ qùnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù tànwàng de shì wáng xiānsheng

It was Mr Wang that I went last year by plane from America to Britain to visit. (The person I went last year by plane from America to Britain to visit was Mr Wang.)

³ Some speakers omit 的 de as in sentences like these:

我去年从美国坐飞机到英国是去探望王先生

wǒ qùnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó shì qù tànwàng wáng xiānsheng

or

我去年从美国坐飞机到英国去是探望王先生!

wǒ qùnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù shì tànwàng wáng xiānsheng

It was to visit Mr Wang that I went last year by plane from America to Britain.

The sentence can be reversed to create a different emphasis, but it remains in line with Chinese syntax:

去年从美国坐飞机到英国去探望王先生的是我。

qùnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù tànwàng wáng xiānsheng de shì wǒ

The person who went last year by plane from America to Britain to visit Mr Wang was me. (I was the one who went last year by plane from America to Britain to visit Mr Wang.)

However, if the statement refers to the future rather than the past, the particle *de* is not included unless the object is to be emphasised. For example:

我是明年从美国坐飞机到英国去探望王先生。

wǒ shì míngnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù tànwàng wáng xiānsheng

It is next year that I will go by plane from America to Britain to visit Mr Wang.

我明年从美国是坐飞机到英国去探望王先生。

wǒ míngnián cóng měiguó shì zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù tànwàng wáng xiānsheng

It is by plane that I will go next year from America to Britain to visit Mr Wang.

我明年从美国坐飞机到英国去探望的是王先生。

wǒ míngnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù tànwàng de shì wáng xiānsheng

It is Mr Wang that I will go next year by plane from America to Britain to visit.

Corresponding negative sentences are couched in a similar way, again with the *de* for past actions but without it for future actions. For example:

不是我(而是我弟弟)去年从美国坐飞机到英国去探望王先生的。

bù shì wǒ (ér shì wǒ dìdì) qùnián cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù tànwàng wáng xiānsheng de

It was not I (but my younger brother) who went last year by plane from America to Britain to visit Mr Wang.

我不是去年(而是前年)从美国坐飞机到英国去探望王先生的。

wǒ bù shì qùnián (ér shì qiánnián) cóng měiguó zuò fēijī dào yīngguó qù tànwàng wáng xiānsheng de

It was not last year (but the year before) that I went by plane from America to Britain to visit Mr Wang.

我不是明年(而是后年)从美国坐飞机到英国去探望王先生。

**wǒ bù shì míngnián (ér shì hòunián) cóng měiguó zuò fēijī
dào yīngguó qù tànwàng wáng xiānsheng**

It is not next year (but the following year) that I will go by plane from America to Britain to visit Mr Wang.

We have so far confined our examples to simple sentences. In fact, emphasis can also be introduced into a subordinate clause beginning with 因为 yīnwèi 'because' to indicate cause or reason. The word order has to be modified under such circumstances.

For instance, if we take the sentence:

因为昨天天气不好，所以我没出去。

yīnwèi zuótiān tiānqì bù hǎo | suǒyǐ wǒ méi chūqù

I did not go out yesterday because the weather was not good.

the emphatic transformation with 是 shì would be:

我昨天没出去是因为天气不好。

wǒ zuótiān méi chūqù shì yīnwèi tiānqì bù hǎo

It was because the weather was not good that I did not go out yesterday.

or:

我昨天之所以没出去是因为天气不好。

wǒ zuótiān zhī suǒyǐ méi chūqù shì yīnwèi tiānqì bù hǎo

The reason why I did not go out yesterday was because the weather was not good.

We have called the sentence stress patterns illustrated above **confirmatory emphasis**, since they confirm a particular point through the combined workings of 是 shì and sentence stress. However, if the sentence stress does not fall on the word or phrase that follows 是 shì but on 是 shì itself, then the emphasis will focus on the whole sentence. We may call this kind of sentence stress pattern **concessionary emphasis**, which in English would be conveyed by tone of voice or by the addition of something like 'It is true that ...'. As the emphasis falls on the whole sentence, it is only natural for 是 shì to come between the subject and the predicate. For example:

我昨天是没来上课。 **wǒ zuótiān shì méi lái shàngkè**

[It is true that] I did not turn up for class yesterday.

我是喝了三杯啤酒。 **wǒ shì hē le sān bēi píjiǔ**

[I must confess that] I did down three glasses of beer.

我是没有钱。 **wǒ shì méiyǒu qián**

[You are right,] I don't have any money.

他是在学习英语。 **tā shì zài xuéxí yīngyǔ**

[Yes,] he is studying English.

Additional remarks to contradict the concession may refer back to any element in the sentence:

我昨天是没来上课，可是预先请了假。

wǒ zuótiān shì méi lái shàngkè | kěshì yùxiān qǐng le jià

[It is true that] I did not turn up for class yesterday, but I had asked for leave in advance.

我昨天是没来上课，可是在家自学。

wǒ zuótiān shì méi lái shàngkè | kěshì zài jiā zìxué

[It is true that] I did not turn up for class yesterday, but I did study on my own at home.

我昨天是没来上课，可是前天来了。

wǒ zuótiān shì méi lái shàngkè | kěshì qiántiān lái le

[It is true that] I did not turn up for class yesterday, but I did come the day before yesterday.

我是喝了三杯啤酒，可是并没有喝醉。

wǒ shì hē le sān bēi píjiǔ | kěshì bìng méiyǒu hē zuì

[I must confess that] I did down three glasses of beer, but I certainly did not get drunk.

我是喝了三杯啤酒，可是我没喝葡萄酒啊。

wǒ shì hē le sān bēi píjiǔ | kěshì wǒ méi hē pútáo jiǔ a

[I must confess that] I did down three glasses of beer, but I did not touch any wine.

Whether the emphasis is confirmatory or concessionary, the presence of 是 *shì* as the core verb in all these sentences makes them expository, even though they can have any type of sentence – narrative (most commonly), descriptive, evaluative or expository – embedded in them.

The negation of either a confirmatory or concessionary emphatic sentence is by the addition of the negator 不 *bù* before 是 *shì*:

我不是没有钱。 **wǒ bù shì méiyǒu qián**

It is not that I don't have any money.

她不是不会说英语。 **tā bù shì bù huì shuō yīngyǔ**

It is not that she doesn't know how to speak English.

15.5 是 *shì* assessing an overall situation

The verb
是 *shì*

是 *shì* may also be used loosely to refer to or to make an overall assessment of a situation, rather like its function as a marker of emphasis.⁴ Under these circumstances, 是 *shì* is not usually stressed, and it is followed by a verbal phrase or a clause. The subject or topic of the sentence can be any part of speech or it can be left out if 是 *shì* is modified by an adverb. For example:

她是不会来了。 *tā shì bù huì lái le*

(lit. she *shì* not probable come *le*)

I don't think she will come./She is unlikely to come.

那是说起来容易，做起来难。

nà shì shuōqǐlái róngyì | zuòqǐlái nán

(lit. that *shì* say up-come easy, do up-come difficult)

That is easier said than done.

如今是什么办法都试过了。

rújīn shì shénme bànfǎ dōu shì guò le

(lit. till now *shì* any method all try *guò le*)

So far we have tried whatever methods we could think of.

这儿是天无三日晴，地无三尺平。

zhèr shì tiān wú sān rì qíng | dì wú sān chǐ píng

(lit. here *shì* sky has not three days fine, land has not three feet level)

Here there aren't three fine days in succession or three square feet of land that are level.

都是你不好。 *dōu shì nǐ bù hǎo*

(lit. all *shì* you not good) It was entirely your fault.

不是我不愿意。 *bù shì wǒ bù yuànyì*

(lit. not *shì* I not willing) It is not that I am/was unwilling.

⁴ See §15.4.

This use of 是 *shì* is most susceptible to modification by adverbs. For example:

他简直是疯了。 *tā jiǎnzhí shì fēng le*

(lit. he simply *shì* mad *le*) He is simply crazy.

她照例是不发表意见。 *tā zhàolì shì bù fābiǎo yìjiàn*

(lit. she as usual *shì* not express opinion)

As usual, she did not express an opinion.

其实是你没有弄明白。

qíshí shì nǐ méiyǒu nòng míngbái

(lit. in fact **shì** you not have achieve comprehension)

In fact you have not got a clear understanding of it.

15.6 是 **shì** forming part of a connector

Precisely because of the particular uses of 是 **shì** discussed in the above sections, many 是 **shì** expressions with their adverbial modifications have become established as conjunctions often used to introduce subordinate or coordinate clauses:

要是你不愿意，我就请别人帮忙。

yàoshì nǐ bù yuànyì | wǒ jiù qǐng biérén bāngmáng

If you are unwilling, I will ask others to help.

你想去看电影还是去听音乐？

nǐ xiǎng qù kàn diànyǐng hái shì qù tīng yīnyuè

Would like to go to the cinema or [to go to] a concert.

我很喜欢这件衣服，可是太贵了。

wǒ hěn xǐhuan zhè jiàn yīfu | kěshì tài guì le

I like this piece of clothing very much, but it is too expensive.

Other such connectors include: 于是 **yúshì** ‘then’, 但是 **dànshì** ‘but’, 尤其是 **yóuqíshì** ‘especially’.

15.7 是 **shì** as a pivot

是 **shì** can also be used as a pivot between two identical words or expressions for emphatic reiteration. The emphasis is confirmed by the presence of an adverbial pre-modifier. For example:

事实总是事实。 **shìshí zǒng shì shìshí**

(lit. facts always are facts.) Facts are facts.

好就是好。 **hǎo jiù shì hǎo**

(lit. good then is good.) What is good is good.

不懂就是不懂。 **bù dǒng jiù shì bù dǒng**

(lit. not understand then is not understand)

If you don't understand, you don't understand.

When there is no adverb, two similar pivotal sentences are needed to make the statement sound complete. For example:

一是一，二是二。

yī shì yī | èr shì èr

(lit. one is one, two are two)

That's how it is [and that's that].

好是好，坏是坏。

hǎo shì hǎo | huài shì huài

(lit. good is good, bad is bad)

What is good is good; and what is bad is bad.

Where there is only one such pivotal sentence, it becomes a concessionary statement and needs to be completed by a further comment. For example:

这件衣服漂亮是漂亮，就是贵了点儿。

zhèi jiàn yīfu piàoliang shì piàoliang | jiù shì guì le diǎnr

(lit. this mw: piece clothing beautiful is beautiful, then is expensive *le*
a little)

This piece of clothing may be beautiful, but it is a little too expensive.

我有是有，可是一下子找不到。

wǒ yǒu shì yǒu | kěshì yī xiàzi zhǎobudào

(lit. I have is have, but one mw: occasion find-not-reach)

I am sure I have this, but I cannot lay my hands on it at the moment.

好是好，可是我还是不去。

hǎo shì hǎo | kěshì wǒ hái shì bù qù

(lit. good is good, but I still not go)

It's all very well, but I am still not going.

The verb 有 *yǒu*

有 *yǒu* ‘to have’, like 是 *shì*, is also extremely versatile, and its grammatical function far exceeds its partial counterpart ‘to have’ in English. It not only expresses possession, but it also indicates existence, characteristics, condition, degree, comparison, and so on. In the following sections, we shall discuss the multiple uses of 有 *yǒu* in different contexts, syntactic as well as lexical. Statements of possession or existence are by definition explanatory and therefore most sentences that incorporate 有 *yǒu* either are or become expository in nature.¹

¹ See Chapter 20 on different sentence types.

16.1 有 *yǒu* indicating possession

The primary meaning of 有 *yǒu* ‘to have’ is to indicate possession. The subject of a 有 *yǒu* sentence, that is, the possessor, is usually a living being, but it can also be an inanimate object that contains or consists of component parts:

我有两个妹妹。 **wǒ yǒu liǎng ge mèimei**

I have two younger sisters.

他有不少词典。 **tā yǒu bùshǎo cídiǎn**

He has quite a lot of dictionaries.

哥哥有一辆摩托车。 **gēge yǒu yī liàng mótuōchē**

(My) elder brother has a motorbike.

每个人都有两只手。 **měi ge rén dōu yǒu liǎng zhī shǒu**

Everyone has two hands.

那本书有个很漂亮的封面。

nèi běn shū yǒu ge hěn piàoliang de fēngmiàn

That book has a very beautiful cover.

这种锅有两个把柄。 **zhèi zhǒng guō yǒu liǎng ge bǎbǐng**
This kind of pot has two handles.

有 **yǒu** is negated by 没 **méi** (and not 不 **bù**). Once negated, it is generally followed by a generic noun, which is not restricted or modified by numeral and measure word phrases or by other attributives unless the restriction or modification itself is the focus of attention or argument:

我没有妹妹。 **wǒ méiyǒu mèimei**
I haven't got/don't have a younger sister.

哥哥没有摩托车。 **gēge méiyǒu mótuōchē**
(My) elder brother hasn't got/doesn't have a motorbike.

这样的戏没有观众。 **zhèyàng de xì méiyǒu guānzhòng**
A play like this doesn't get an audience.

One does not say:

*我没有两个妹妹。 **wǒ méiyǒu liǎng ge mèimei**
*I don't have two younger sisters.

*这样的戏没有五百个观众。
zhèyàng de xì méiyǒu wǔ bǎi ge guānzhòng
*A play like this doesn't get an audience of five hundred.

unless the specific number is the focus of contrast:

他只有一个妹妹，没有两个。
tā zhīyǒu yī ge mèimei | méiyǒu liǎng ge
He has only one younger sister, not two.

那种锅没有两个把柄，只有一个。
nèi zhǒng guō méiyǒu liǎng ge bǎbǐng | zhīyǒu yī ge
This kind of pot doesn't have two handles, but only one.

The negation can be made more emphatic by reversing the order of the object noun and 有 **yǒu**, with the noun qualified by 一 **yī** 'a single' or 半 **bàn** 'half' and the appropriated measure word, and with 有 **yǒu** modified by 也 **yě** or 都 **dōu**:²

我一个妹妹也没有。 **wǒ yī ge mèimei yě méiyǒu**
I don't even have one younger sister.

他半本词典都没有。 **tā bàn běn cídiǎn dōu méiyǒu**
He doesn't even have half a dictionary.

² See also §1.2.2.

16.2 有 **yǒu** indicating existence

有 **yǒu** indicates existence, if the subject of the sentence is a time or location expression. The object of 有 **yǒu** naturally refers to the person or thing that exists in that particular location or at that particular time.

明天晚上有个音乐会。

míngtiān wǎnshang yǒu ge yīnyuèhuì

Tomorrow evening there's a concert.

书架上有很多杂志。 **shūjià shàng yǒu hěn duō zázhì**

There are many magazines on the bookcase.

商店里有不少顾客。 **shāngdiàn lǐ yǒu bùshǎo gùkè**

There are quite a few customers in the store/shop.

The negation of the existential verb 有 **yǒu** is either 没有 **méiyǒu** or 没 **méi**:

那时候，街上没有一个行人。

³ **nèi shíhou | jiē shàng méiyǒu yī ge xíng rén**

At that time, there wasn't one pedestrian on the street.

屋子里没人。 **wūzi lǐ méi rén**

There is no one in the room.

楼下没有电话。 **lóu xià méiyǒu diànhuà**

There isn't a telephone downstairs.

³ The object of a non-existential 没有 **méiyǒu**, like non-possession, cannot be associated with numerals and measures: e.g. *那时候，街上没有两个行人* 'At that time, there weren't two pedestrians on the street'. However, the numeral 一 **yī** plus a measure is possible because in a sentence like this it does not literally indicate a number but emphasises the idea of 'none' or 'not a single one'.

The negation of an existential sentence, as with a possession sentence, can be made more insistent by moving the object noun before 有 **yǒu** and by adding 也 **yě** or 都 **dōu**:

那时候，街上一个行人也没有。

nèi shíhou | jiē shàng yī ge xíng rén yě méiyǒu

At that time, there wasn't [even] one pedestrian on the street.

天上半朵云也没有。 **tiān shàng bàn duǒ yún yě méiyǒu**

There isn't/wasn't (half) a cloud in the sky.

屋子里一点声音都没有。 **wūzi lǐ yīdiǎn shēngyīn dōu méiyǒu**

There wasn't the slightest sound in the room.

There is often a fine line between 有 **yǒu** indicating possession and 有 **yǒu** meaning existence, which can invite alternative translations in English:

图书馆有很多中文书。 **túshūguǎn yǒu hěnduō zhōngwén shū**

The library has a lot of Chinese books.

There are a lot of Chinese books in the library.

这座楼一个电梯也没有。 **zhè zuò lóu yī ge diàntī yě méiyǒu**

This building doesn't have one lift/elevator.

There isn't one lift/elevator in this building.

The semantic difference between 有 **yǒu** and 是 **shì** when indicating existence has been explained in the previous chapter (§15.3). As we saw, 是 **shì** can be followed by nouns of either definite or indefinite reference, but 有 **yǒu** takes nouns of only indefinite reference. For example:

前面是两座大山。 **qiánmiàn shì liǎng zuò dà shān** (indefinite)

In front are two big mountains.

对面就是我家。 **duìmiàn jiùshì wǒ jiā** (definite)

Opposite is my home.

but:

沿路有很多商店。 **yánlù yǒu hěnduō shāngdiàn**

Along the road there are many shops.

靠床有一个衣柜。 **kào chuáng yǒu yī ge yīguì**

There is a wardrobe next to the bed.

桌子上没有书。 **zhuōzi shàng méiyǒu shū**

There aren't any books on the table.

*马路对面有那家商店。 **mǎlù duìmiàn yǒu nà jiā shāngdiàn**

Opposite the main road there is that store/shop.

16.3 有 **yǒu** introducing subjects and time or location expressions of indefinite reference

Chinese, unlike English, lacks definite and indefinite articles, and definite and indefinite reference is often decided simply by context. However, in narrative sentences, it is usually the position of a noun in relation to the verb that indicates its reference. A noun in a pre-verbal position, that is, the subject of a sentence, generally encodes known or old information and is therefore of definite reference; whereas a noun in a post-verbal position

and the object of a verb tends to encode unknown or new information and is consequently of indefinite reference. The English translations below illustrate this:

那时候客人来了。 **nèi shíhòu kèrén lái le**

At that moment the guest(s) arrived.

那时候来了一个客人。 **nèi shíhòu lái le yī ge kèrén**

At that moment a guest arrived.

However, 有 **yǒu** is used as a dummy verb when an indefinitely referenced noun is moved to a subject, that is, pre-verbal position. The presence of 有 **yǒu** before the noun ensures that the noun retains its post-verbal position and its indefinite reference:

那时候有(一)⁴个医生进来了。

nèi shíhòu yǒu (yī) ge yīshēng jìn lái le

At that moment a doctor came in.

*那时候一个医生进来了。

nèi shíhòu yī ge yīshēng jìn lái le

At that moment a doctor came in.

⁴ 一 **yī** 'one' is usually omitted for reasons of rhythm. 一个 **yī ge** is disyllabic, but when 有 **yǒu** is added, the phrase becomes awkwardly trisyllabic. To return to the more comfortable disyllabic rhythm, 一 **yī** is therefore generally left out (see [Chapter 26](#) on prosody).

In this case the other and perhaps more natural option would remain:

那时候进来了一个医生。

nèi shíhòu jìn lái le yī ge yīshēng

At that moment a doctor came in.

However, this last option is possible only with an intransitive verb (like the one in the example). If the verb in the sentence has an object or a complement, the 有 **yǒu** construction becomes obligatory. For example:

(外面)有人在敲门。 **(wàimian) yǒu rén zài qiāo mén**

There is someone (outside) knocking at the door.

(这时候)有辆车在路口停了下来。

(zhè shíhòu) yǒu liàng chē zài lùkǒu tíng le xiàlai

(At this moment) a car stopped at the intersection.

花丛中有很多蜜蜂在采蜜。

huācóng zhōng yǒu hěn duō mìfēng zài cǎi mì

There were lots of bees gathering nectar from the flowers.

Time and location expressions are of definite reference and are naturally placed at the beginning of a sentence or very early in a sentence in a pre-verbal position:

那天我去找他。 **nèi tiān wǒ qù zhǎo tā**

That day I went to look for him.

火车站里挤满了人。 **huǒchēzhàn lǐ jǐ mǎn le rén**

The railway station was packed with people.

However, if the time or location expression is intentionally indefinite, 有 **yǒu** will once again have to be introduced:

有一天我去找他。 **yǒu yī tiān wǒ qù zhǎo tā**

One day I went to look for him.

有个火车站不停普通客车。

yǒu ge huǒchēzhàn bù tíng pǔtōng kèchē

There is one railway station where ordinary passenger trains don't stop.

Other examples are:

有一次/有一回我在城里遇见他。

yǒu yī cì | yǒu yī huí wǒ zài chéng lǐ yùjiàn tā

On one occasion, I met him in the town.

有时候他也上我家来。 **yǒu shíhòu tā yě shàng wǒ jiā lái**

Sometimes he came to my home too.

16.4 有 **yǒu** specifying degree or extent

有 **yǒu** is used with adjectives like 大 **dà** 'big', 高 **gāo** 'tall', 重 **zhòng** 'heavy', to specify how big, tall, heavy, etc., something or somebody is.

他的屋子有多大? **tāde wūzi yǒu duō dà**

How big is his room?

他的屋子有三米长，两米宽。

tāde wūzi yǒu sān mǐ cháng | liǎng mǐ kuān

His room is 3 metres long and 2 metres wide.

你弟弟有多高? **nǐ dìdì yǒu duō gāo**

How tall is your younger brother?

我弟弟有一米九高。 **wǒ dìdì yǒu yī mǐ jiǔ gāo**

My younger brother is 1.9 metres tall.

这个包裹有两公斤重。 **zhèi ge bāoguǒ yǒu liǎng gōngjīn zhòng**
This parcel weighs 2 kilos. (lit. 2 kilos heavy)

The phrases 有点 **yǒudiǎn** or 有些 **yǒuxiē** meaning ‘a little; a bit’ may be used before adjectives or verbs in the predicate to indicate ‘to a certain extent or degree’:

我有点紧张。 **wǒ yǒudiǎn jǐnzhāng**
I’m a bit nervous.

他有些害怕。 **tā yǒuxiē hàipà**
He’s a bit afraid.

大家都有点舍不得他离开这儿。
dàjiā dōu yǒudiǎn shěbude tā líkāi zhèr
Everyone was a little sorry he was leaving here.

16.5 有 **yǒu** introducing comparison⁵

The capacity of 有 **yǒu** to specify degree or extent leads on naturally to its function of introducing comparisons. Often, 那么 **nàme** or 那样 **nàyàng** ‘so, like that’ is present, and the basic formula is N1 + (没)有 **(méi)yǒu** + N2 + (那么) **(nàme)** + adjective + (吗) **(ma)**:

你弟弟有你(那么)高吗? **nǐ dìdì yǒu nǐ (nàme) gāo ma**
Is your younger brother as tall as you?

我弟弟没有我(这么)高。 **wǒ dìdì méiyǒu wǒ (zhème) gāo**
My younger brother isn’t as tall as me.

这个包裹有那个(那么)重吗?
zhèi ge bāoguǒ yǒu nèi ge (nàme) zhòng ma
Is this parcel as heavy as that one?

这个包裹真的有那个(那么)重。
zhèi ge bāoguǒ zhēnde yǒu nèi ge (nàme) zhòng
This parcel really is as heavy as that one.

那条狗有一只小老虎(那样)大。
nèi tiáo gǒu yǒu yī zhī xiǎo lǎohǔ (nàyàng) dà
That dog is as big as a small tiger.

这棵树有一个人(那么)高。 **zhèi kē shù yǒu yī ge rén (nàme) gāo**
This tree is as tall as a man.

⁵ See [Chapter 11](#) on the coverb 比 **bǐ** and comparisons.

16.6 有 **yǒu** as an adjectival formative

有 **yǒu** is also a most versatile element in the formation of an almost unlimited number of adjectives or adjectival phrases in the lexicon. It does this by incorporating nominal objects. For example:

有 yǒu to have	+	钱 qián	money	=	rich; wealthy
有 yǒu to have	+	利 lì	profit; benefit	=	profitable; beneficial
有 yǒu to have	+	能力 nénglì	ability	=	capable; able
有 yǒu to have	+	办法 bànfǎ	method	=	resourceful

Here are some more examples in sentences:

这个人有信用吗? **zhèi ge rén yǒu xìnyòng ma**

(lit. does this person have credit) Is this person trustworthy?

那个孩子很有礼貌。 **nèi ge háizi hěn yǒu lǐmào**

(lit. that child very much has courtesy) That child is very polite.

我今晚没(有)空。 **wǒ jīnwǎn méi(yǒu) kòng**

(lit. I tonight don't have spare time) I am busy tonight.

16.7 有 **yǒu** expressing ideas of development and change

有 **yǒu** is often used with verbal nouns like 提高 **tígāo** 'improvement', 发展 **fāzhǎn** 'development', 变化 **biànhuà** 'change', 进步 **jìnbù** 'progress', 增长 **zēngzhǎng** 'increase', to express ideas of development and change.

她的中文有了显著的提高。

tāde zhōngwén yǒu le xiǎnzhù de tígāo

Her Chinese has seen marked improvement.

人们的思想有了很大的变化。

rénmen de sīxiǎng yǒu le hěn dà de biànhuà

People's thinking has undergone a huge change.

16.8 有 **yǒu** introducing a conditional clause

只有⁶ **zhǐyǒu** 'only when; only if' is used in a full or abbreviated clause⁷ to form a conditional clause. The main clause that follows incorporates

⁶ See Chapter 22 on conjunctions and conjunctives.

⁷ A full clause is defined as one with subject and predicate; and an abbreviated clause is one where the subject of the clause is omitted, but appears in the main clause later on.

the monosyllabic adverb 才 *cái* ‘only then’ before the predicate verb to echo the condition posed by 只有 *zhǐyǒu*. The main clause will have a full form if the conditional clause is abbreviated, and an abbreviated form if the conditional clause is in its full form. Both the conditional clause and the main clause need of course to be full if their respective subjects are different.

只有懂得这一点，你才能进步。

zhǐyǒu dǒngde zhèi yīdiǎn | nǐ cái néng jìnbù

Only if you understand this point will you be able to make progress.

你只有懂得这一点，才能进步。

nǐ zhǐyǒu dǒngde zhèi yīdiǎn | cái néng jìnbù

Only if you understand this point will you be able to make progress.

只有你懂得这一点，我才能帮助你。

zhǐyǒu nǐ dǒngde zhèi yīdiǎn | wǒ cái néng bāngzhù nǐ

Only if you understand this point will I be able to help you.

只有有人献血，我们才能救活他。

zhǐyǒu yǒu rén xiàn xuè/xiě | wǒmen cái néng jiùhuó tā

Only if people donate blood will we be able to save him.

16.9 没(有) *méi(yǒu)* as negator of action verbs

16.9.1 Negator of past action/experience

没(有) *méi(yǒu)* is the negator of past action (in a narrative sentence) and of past experience (in an expository sentence). Notice that in the case of the former, the completed action aspect marker 了 *le* is not present, while in the latter, the experiential verbal suffix 过 *guo* is retained:

他没(有)去北京。 **tā méi(yǒu) qù běijīng** (narrative)

He did not go to Beijing.

他没(有)去过北京。 **tā méi(yǒu) qù guo běijīng** (expository)

He has never been to Beijing.

16.9.2 Affirmative–negative questions and past action/experience

Affirmative–negative questions relating to past action and experience are also constructed with 没有 *méiyǒu*, though for these 有 *yǒu* is usually retained. Note that in past-action questions the aspect marker 了 *le* has

to be present because the completion of the action has to be expressed as the affirmative alternative.

他去了北京没有? **tā qù le běijīng méiyǒu**

Did he go to Beijing?

他去过北京没有? **tā qù guo běijīng méiyǒu**

Has he been to Beijing?

The verb
有 **yǒu**

16.9.3 Another form of the question

These alternative questions may also be expressed by putting 有没有 **yǒu méiyǒu** before the verb (in past action questions) or the verb + 过 **guo** (in enquiries about experience). This form of the question is used throughout China, but it is perhaps more characteristic of the speech of people in the south of the country.

他有没有去北京? **tā yǒu méiyǒu qù běijīng**

Did he go to Beijing?

他有没有去过北京? **tā yǒu méiyǒu qù guo běijīng**

Has he been to Beijing?

16.10 有 **yǒu** to indicate 'part of'

In these constructions, a topic is first posed and is then followed by 有的 **yǒude** to indicate different elements or parts. 的 **de** may be positioned after 有 **yǒu** or it can be left till the end of the construction, and the predicate that comes after 有 **yǒu** may be adjectival or verbal:

我的领带，有的贵，有的便宜。

wǒde lǐngdài | yǒude guì | yǒude piányi

Some of my ties are expensive, some cheap.

我的领带，有贵的，也有便宜的。

wǒde lǐngdài | yǒu guì de | yě yǒu piányi de

As for my ties, there are expensive ones and cheap ones.

这儿的學生，有的会说法语，有的会说德语，有的会说西班牙语。

zhèr de xuésheng | yǒude huì shuō fǎyǔ | yǒude huì shuō déyǔ | yǒude huì shuō xībānyáyǔ

Some of the students here can speak French, some German and others Spanish.

这儿的學生，有会说法语的，有会说德语的，也有会说西班牙语的。
zhèr de xuésheng | yǒu huì shuō fǎyǔ de | yǒu huì shuō déyǔ de | yě yǒu huì shuō xībānyáyǔ de

As for the students here, there are some that can speak French, some German and others Spanish.

A more emphatic version links 的 *de* to the adjectival or verbal predicate and leaves the verb 有 *yǒu* until the end of the clause:

我的領帶，貴的有，便宜的也有。

wǒde lǐngdài | guì de yǒu | piányi de yě yǒu

As for ties, I've got expensive ones and cheap ones too.

这儿的學生，会说法语的有，会说德语的有，会说西班牙语的也有。

zhèr de xuésheng | huì shuō fǎyǔ de yǒu | huì shuō déyǔ de yǒu | huì shuō xībānyáyǔ de yě yǒu

As for the students here, there are some that can speak French, some German and others Spanish too.

If a nominal predicate is intended, then 是 *shì* must be incorporated after 有的 *yǒude*:

展出的書，有的是原著，有的是譯本。

zhǎnchū de shū | yǒude shì yuánzhù | yǒude shì yìběn

Of the books on display, some are original books and some are translations.

In this case, however, 的 *de* may be left out altogether, and 有 *yǒu* then becomes the main verb:

展出的書，有原著，也有譯本。

zhǎnchū de shū | yǒu yuánzhù | yě yǒu yìběn

Of the books on display, there are original books and there are also translations.

16.11 有 *yǒu* as the first verb in a sequence

有 *yǒu* is frequently used in a serial sequence following the pattern of subject + 有 *yǒu* + verb . . . For example:

誰有時間幫我一下忙嗎？

shuí yǒu shíjiān bāng wǒ yíxià máng ma

Who has time to give me some help?

你有没有钱买一盒巧克力?

nǐ yǒu méiyǒu qián mǎi yī hé qiǎokèlì

Do you have the money to buy a box of chocolates?

我没有办法解决这个问题。

wǒ méiyǒu bànfǎ jiějué zhèi ge wèntí

I have no way to solve this problem.

The verb
有 **yǒu**

Chapter 17

Verbs that take verbal or clausal objects

This chapter deals with cognitive verbs and verbs of emotion. Though some of them take noun objects, they tend to be followed by verbal or clausal objects and are more expository than narrative in nature. They are in fact not unlike modal verbs, which, as we shall see in [Chapter 18](#), take verbal objects but which can be categorised as evaluative rather than expository. These cognition or emotion verbs convey a range of meaning covering intention, disposition, knowledge, etc., and because of their expository nature, they are more likely to be associated with the negator 不 *bù* rather than 没有 *méiyǒu*.

她不喜欢吃面。 **tā bù xǐhuan chī miàn**

She does not like (eating) noodles.

*她没喜欢吃面。 **tā méi xǐhuan chī miàn**

As we have already seen, 不 *bù* ‘not’ negates actions that are or were not intended to be carried out while 没(有) *méi(you)* ‘not’ refers to actions that were or have not been carried out.

昨天上午她故意不去上班。

zuótiān shàngwǔ tā gùyì bù qù shàngbān

Yesterday morning, she deliberately would not go to work.

昨天上午她没去上班。

zuótiān shàngwǔ tā méi qù shàngbān

Yesterday morning, she did not go to work.

For the same reason, these emotion or sense verbs cannot be used with the aspect-marker 了 *le*, even if they refer to the past:

他以前喜欢喝咖啡。 **tā yǐqián xǐhuan hē kāfēi**

He used to like drinking coffee (in the past).

One cannot say, for example:

*他以前喜欢了喝咖啡。 ***tā yǐqián xǐhuan le hē kāfēi**

Most verbs in this category, as we have said, may take either verbal or clausal objects. The distinction between a verbal and a clausal object lies in whether the action expressed in the object verb or clause is initiated by the subject of the sentence. If it is, the object will be a verbal expression; if it is not, the object takes the form of a clause:

你希望什么时候休假? (a verbal object)

nǐ xīwàng shénme shíhou xiūjià

(lit. you hope what time take holiday)

When do you hope to go on holiday?

你希望你太太什么时候休假? (a clausal object)

nǐ xīwàng nǐ tàitai shénme shíhou xiūjià

(lit. you hope wife what time take holiday)

When do you hope that your wife will take her holiday?

We will now list the verbs in semantic groups.

17.1 Intention and aspiration

17.1.1 Positive intentions and aspirations

准备 **zhǔnbèi** ‘to prepare, plan’, 打算 **dǎsuàn** ‘to prepare’, 决定 **juéding** ‘to decide’, 试图 **shìtú** ‘to try’, 企图 **qǐtú** ‘to attempt’, 设法 **shèfǎ** ‘to design’, 要求 **yāoqiú** ‘to request’, 希望 **xīwàng** ‘to hope’, 盼望 **pànwàng** ‘to long’, 渴望 **kěwàng** ‘to yearn’, 期望 **qíwàng** ‘to expect’, 指望 **zhǐwàng** ‘to look forward’, 立志 **lìzhì** ‘to be determined’, 热心 **rèxīn** ‘to be eager’, 忍不住 **rěnbuzhù** ‘cannot help but’.

你打算几时走? **nǐ dǎsuàn jǐshí zǒu**

(lit. you intend what time go) When do you intend to go?

我带了一筒饼干和几包薯片，准备在路上吃。

wǒ dài le yī tǒng bǐnggān hé jǐ bāo shǔpiàn | zhǔnbèi zài lù shàng chī

(lit. I bring **le** one mw:tube biscuits and a few mw: packets potato crisps, prepare cv:on road-top eat)

I have brought a tube of biscuits and few packets of potato crisps to eat on the way.

他们准备下午四点钟开个讨论会。

tāmen zhǔnbèi xiàwǔ sì diǎn zhōng kāi ge tāolùn huì
(lit. they plan afternoon four mw: dot clock hold mw
seminar/symposium)

They plan to hold a seminar/symposium at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

他决定下个月动身去欧洲旅游。

tā juéding xià ge yuè dòngshēn qù ōuzhōu lǚyóu
(lit. he decide next mw month set out go Europe travel)
He has decided to go travelling in Europe next month.

朋友们都希望他早日恢复健康。

péngyoumen dōu xīwàng tā zǎorì huīfù jiànkāng
(lit. friends all hope he early days recover health)
His friends all hope he will soon recover his health.

计划 *jìhuà* 'to plan', 考虑 *kǎolǜ* 'to consider', 琢磨 *zuómo* 'to ponder', 衡量 *héngliáng* 'to weigh the pros and cons', etc., also belong to this group. They often incorporate interrogatives in the verbal or clausal object:

你琢磨琢磨这里面还有什么问题。

nǐ zuómo zuómo zhè lǐmiàn hái yǒu shénme wèntí
(lit. you ponder-ponder this-inside still have what problems)
You ponder whether there are still any problems here/in this.

请你考虑一下怎么教育这个孩子。

qǐng nǐ kǎolǜ yīxià zěnmē jiàoyù zhèi ge hái
(lit. please you consider one mw:occasion how educate this mw
child)

Please give some consideration to how this child might be educated.

17.1.2 Negative intentions

懒得 *lǎndé* 'to save oneself the trouble', 免得 *miǎndé* 'to avoid', 以免 *yǐmiǎn* 'to avoid', 省得 *shěngdé* 'to evade', 舍不得 *shěbudé* 'cannot bear', 后悔 *hòuhuǐ* 'to regret', 讨厌 *tǎoyàn* 'to hate', 不屑 *bùxiè* 'to disdain', 反对 *fǎnduì* 'to oppose', 犯不着 *fànbuzháo* 'to be not worth one's while'.

我后悔没有学会开车。

wǒ hòuhuǐ méiyǒu xué huì kāi chē
(lit. I regret did not learn-able drive car)
I regret that I never learned to drive.

我到达之后马上给他发了一个电子邮件，免得他记挂。

**wǒ dàodá zhīhòu mǎshàng gěi tā fā le yī ge diànzǐ yóujiàn |
miǎndé tā jìguà**

(lit. I arrive afterwards immediately cv: to him send **le** one mw email
to avoid he be concerned)

When I arrived, I immediately sent him an email to avoid making him
anxious.

她不该这么说，但是你犯不着跟她生气。

tā bùgāi zhème shuō | dànshì nǐ fànbuzháo gēn tā shēngqì

(lit. she not ought like this speak, but you not worth while cv:with
her get angry)

She ought not to have said this, but it is not worth your getting
angry with her.

17.1.3 Uncertain aspirations

幻想 **huànxǐǎng** ‘to dream’, 妄想 **wàngxiǎng** ‘to hope vainly’, 恨不得 **hènbudé** ‘to wish very much’, 巴不得 **bābudé** ‘to wish earnestly’.

孩子们都幻想当电脑专家。

háizimen dōu huànxǐǎng dāng diànnǎo zhuānjiā

(lit. children all dream be computer expert)

Children all dream of becoming computer experts.

那个北方人恨不得自己马上能说广州话。

**nèi ge běifāng rén hènbudé zìjǐ mǎshàng néng shuō
guǎngzhōu huà**

(lit. that mw northern man very much wish himself immediately be
able speak Cantonese)

That northerner very much wants to be able to speak Cantonese
straight away.

17.1.4 Group intentions

研究 **yánjiū** ‘to study, consider, give thought to’, 讨论 **tǎolùn** ‘to discuss’,
商量 **shāngliang** ‘to consult’, 酝酿 **yùnniàng** ‘to discuss informally’, 策划
cèhuà ‘to plan’, 合计 **héjì** ‘to put heads together’.¹

¹ 研究 **yánjiū** ‘to study, consider, give thought to’ and 策划 **cèhuà** ‘to plan’ in this
group of verbs may, of course, also be used with individual subjects.

Sentences with these verbs often incorporate an adverb like 怎样 *zěnyàng* ‘how’ or 如何 *rúhé* ‘in what fashion’ within the object verb expression or clause. They may also often be reduplicated to express urgency.

请大家研究研究如何救济这些难民。

qǐng dàjiā yánjiū yánjiū rúhé jiùjì zhèi xiē nànmín

(lit. please everyone study-study how relieve these mw refugees)

Please would everyone give thought to how to get relief to these refugees.

咱们商量一下这个会议怎么开。

zánmen shāngliang yīxià zhèi ge huìyì zěnmē kāi

(lit. we consult one mw:occasion this mw meeting how hold)

Let's consult about how to hold this meeting.

17.1.5 Voiced intentions

建议 *jiànyì* ‘to suggest’, 主张 *zhǔzhāng* ‘to propose’, 宣布 *xuānbù* ‘to announce’, 说明 *shuōmíng* ‘to explain’, 强调 *qiángdiào* ‘to emphasise’, 发誓 *fāshì* ‘to vow’, 保证 *bǎozhèng* ‘to guarantee’, 扬言 *yángyán* ‘to declare’, 叫嚣 *jiàoxiāo* ‘to clamour’.

我建议坐长途汽车去。 **wǒ jiànyì zuò chángtú qìchē qù**

(lit. I suggest cv:travel by long distance bus go)

I suggest going by coach/long-distance bus.

谁都主张把问题先搁一搁。

shuí dōu zhǔzhāng bǎ wèntí xiān gē yī gē

(lit. everyone all propose cv:grasping question first shelve-one-shelve)

Everyone proposes that the question be shelved for a while now.

他宣布辞职。 **tā xuānbù cízhí**

(lit. he announce resign) He announced his resignation.

17.1.6 Intentions put into practice

开始 *kāishǐ* ‘to begin’, 继续 *jìxù* ‘to continue’, 着手 *zhuóshǒu* ‘to tackle’, 抓紧 *zhuājǐn* ‘to make haste’, 负责 *fùzé* ‘to be responsible’.

新生已经开始报到。 **xīnshēng yǐjīng kāishǐ bàodào**

(lit. new students already begin register)

The new students have already begun to register.

冷空气正继续向南移动。

lěng kōngqì zhèng jìxù xiàng nán yídòng

(lit. cold air just continue cv:towards south move)

Cold air is continuing to move south.

17.1.7 Frustration and compulsion

停止 **tíngzhǐ** ‘to stop’, 不堪 **bùkān** ‘cannot bear’, 不宜 **bùyí** ‘be unsuitable’, 不便 **bùbiàn** ‘be inconvenient’, 不致 **bùzhì** ‘to fail, not to result in’, 不禁 **bújīn** ‘cannot help’, 不甘 **bùgān** ‘be unwilling, not resigned to’, 不屑 **bùxiè** ‘to disdain’, 不由得 **bùyóudé** ‘cannot help, cannot but’, 禁不住 **jīnbuzhù** ‘cannot bear’.

那家商店已经停止营业。

nèi jiā shāngdiàn yǐjīng tíngzhǐ yíngyè

(lit. that mw shop already stop business)

That shop has already gone out of business.

一阵海风吹来，我禁不住打了一个寒颤。

yī zhèn hǎifēng chuīlái | wǒ jīnbuzhù dǎ le yīge hánchàn

(lit. one mw:blast sea wind blow-come, I cannot help give **le** one mw shiver)

There was a blast/gust of sea breeze, and I could not help giving a shiver.

17.2 Attitudes

爱 **ài** ‘to love’, 喜欢 **xǐhuan** ‘to like’, 乐意 **lèyì** ‘to be willing’, 害怕 **hàipà** ‘to fear’, 敢于 **gǎnyú** ‘to be brave enough’, 勇于 **yǒngyú** ‘to be courageous enough’, 甘于 **gānyú** ‘to consign oneself’, 急于 **jíyú** ‘to be anxious’, 善于 **shànyú** ‘to be good at’, 习惯 **xíguàn** ‘to be accustomed’, 假装 **jiǎzhuāng** ‘to pretend’, 适合 **shìhé** ‘to be suitable for’.

These verbs are often modified by a degree adverb (e.g. 很 **hěn** ‘very much’), and a number have the suffix 于 **yú**. They normally take verbal rather than clausal objects because the actions in the verbal objects are generally initiated by the subject of the sentence.

他很乐意帮助大家。 **tā hěn lèyì bāngzhù dàjiā**

(lit. he very willing help everyone)

He is very willing to help everyone.

那个人真喜欢开玩笑。 **nèi ge rén zhēn xǐhuan kāi wánxiào**
(lit. that mw man really like make jokes)
That man really likes making jokes.

我爱听中国传统音乐。 **wǒ ài tīng zhōngguó chuántǒng yīnyuè**
(lit. I love listen to China traditional music)
I love listening to traditional Chinese music.

铁爱生锈。 **tiě ài shēng xiù** [a metaphorical extension]
(lit. iron love rust) Iron is apt to get rusty.

要敢于提出自己的见解。 **yào gǎnyú tíchū zìjǐ de jiànjiě**
(lit. must be brave enough to raise self **de** opinions)
You must be brave enough to put forward your own opinions.

别急于求成。 **bié jíyú qiú chéng**
(lit. don't be anxious achieve success)
Don't be anxious to achieve success.

17.3 Knowing and thinking

记得 **jìdé** 'to remember', 忘记 **wàngjì** 'to forget', 知道 **zhīdào** 'to know',
相信 **xiāngxìn** 'to believe', 觉得 **juéde** 'to feel', 感到 **gǎndào** 'to feel', 认为
rènwéi 'to think', 以为 **yǐwéi** 'to suppose', 估计 **gūjì** 'to surmise', 肯定
kěndìng 'to be sure', 担心 **dānxīn** 'to be worried', 怕 **pà** 'to be afraid',
怀疑 **huáiyí** 'to suspect', 同意 **tóngyì** 'to agree', 证明 **zhèngmíng** 'to prove',
断定 **duàndìng** 'to conclude'.

你离开的时候, 请记得把窗户关上。

nǐ líkāi de shíhou | qǐng jìdé bǎ chuānghu guān shàng
(lit. you leave **de** time, please remember cv:grasping window close-to)
Please remember to shut the window(s) when you leave.

对不起, 我忘记把你要的书带来了。

duibuqǐ | wǒ wàngjì bǎ nǐ yào de shū dài lái le
(lit. sorry, I forgot cv:grasping you want **de** book bring-come **le**)
Sorry, I forgot to bring the book(s) you want.

很多人都相信英国球队一定能打赢。

hěn duō rén dōu xiāngxìn yīngguó qiúduì yīdìng néng dǎ yíng
(lit. very many people all believe England football team definitely can win)
Many people believe that the English (football) team will certainly
(be able to) win.

我觉得他说的话是很对的。

wǒ juéde tā shuō de huà shì hěn duì de
(lit. I feel he said **de** words are very correct **de**)
I feel that what he said was quite right.

这件事我认为应该先跟他商量一下。

zhèi jiàn shì wǒ rènwéi yīnggāi xiān gēn tā shāngliang yíxià
(lit. this mw matter I think must first cv:with him consult one mw:occasion)
I think that this matter ought to be discussed with him first.

17.4 Appearance and value

好象 **hǎoxiàng** ‘to seem’, 显得 **xiǎnde** ‘to appear’, 不如 **bùrú** ‘to be better’, 值得 **zhíde** ‘to be worth’, 不足 **bùzú** ‘to be not enough’, 不见得 **bù jiàn de** ‘to be not necessarily so’, 看起来 **kàn qilai** ‘to look as if’, 在于 **zàiyú** ‘to rest on’, 有待 **yǒudài** ‘to wait for’.

These verbs tend to make comments or judgement about happenings, and the person making the judgement is often unstated.

她好象有什么心事。

tā hǎoxiàng yǒu shénme xīnshì
(lit. she seem have what worries)
She seems to have something on her mind.

这本书值得一读。

zhèi běn shū zhíde yī dú
(lit. this mw book worth one read)
This book is worth a read.

这样的问题不值得争论。

zhèyàng de wèntí bù zhíde zhēnglùn
(lit. this kind **de** questions not worth debate)
A question like this is not worth arguing about.

那个问题有待解决。

nèi ge wèntí yǒudài jiějué
(lit. that mw problem need resolve)
That problem waits to be resolved.

口说不足为凭。

kǒu shuō bù zú wéi píng
(lit. mouth say not sufficient as proof)
Verbal statements are not enough for proof.

17.5 Dummy verbs

There are circumstances when a plain verb is felt to be rhythmically or stylistically inadequate and a dummy or make-weight verb is introduced before the original verb, making it the verbal object of the dummy verb. Such linguistic manoeuvres are similar to dichotomies in English, like ‘consider’ and ‘give consideration to’, ‘solve’ and ‘provide a solution to’, and so on. Unlike some of the categories of verbs above, these dummy verbs may be negated by either 不 *bù* or 没有 *méi(yǒu)*.

There are three common dummy verbs in the language:

- (a) 加以 *jiāyǐ* ‘to provide (an envisaged result)’, which is often found with verbal objects like:

解决 *jiějué* ‘to resolve’, 分析 *fēnxī* ‘to analyse’ and 考虑 *kǎolù* ‘to consider’.

我们对这种情况应该加以分析。

wǒmen duì zhèzhǒng qíngkuàng yīnggāi jiāyǐ fēnxī
(lit. we cv:towards this mw:kind situation ought to dv: provide analyse)

We ought to make an analysis of circumstances like these.

这样的问题必须及时加以解决。

zhèyàng de wèntí bìxū jíshí jiāyǐ jiějué
(lit. this kind *de* questions ought to in time dv: provide resolve)
A question like this ought to be resolved promptly.

- (b) 进行 *jìnxíng*² ‘to start or carry out (an indicated process)’ which is followed by verbal objects like:

研究 *yánjiū* ‘to study’, 探讨 *tàntǎo* ‘to explore’, etc.

我们能否碰一碰头对这件事进行认真的研究?

wǒmen néng fǒu pèng yī pèng tóu duì zhèi jiàn shì jìnxíng rènzhēn de yánjiū

(lit. we can or not bump-one-bump head cv:towards this mw matter dv: carry out serious study)

Can we put our heads together and carry out a serious study of this?

² 进行 *jìnxíng* and 给予 *gěiyǔ* (see (c) below) are the only two verbs in this category that may take the aspect marker 了 *le*.

生物学家对遗传基因进行了广泛的探讨。

shēngwùxuéjiā duì yíchuán jīyīn jìnxíng le guǎngfàn de tàntǎo

(lit. biologist cv:towards hereditary genes dv: carry out **le** extensive exploration)

Biologists carried out/pursued a wide-ranging exploration of hereditary genes.

- (c) 给予 **jǐyǔ/gěiyǔ** or 给与 **jǐyǔ/gěiyǔ**³ ‘to grant (action as necessary)’, which links with:

照顾 **zhàogù** ‘care’, 同情 **tóngqíng** ‘sympathy’ and
关注 **guānzhù** ‘attention’.

对死难者的家属，我们必须给予照顾。

duì sǐnànzhě de jiāshǔ | wǒmen bìxū jǐyǔ/gěiyǔ zhàogù

(lit. cv:towards die-killed-in-an-accident-person **de** relatives, we must dv: grant care)

We must provide care for the families of those who have died.

世界人权组织对人权问题给予了极大的关注。

shìjiè rénquán zǔzhī duì rénquán wèntí jǐyǔ/gěiyǔ le jí dà de guānzhù

(lit. world human rights organisation cv:towards human rights questions dv: grant **le** extreme great concern)

World human rights organisations paid the greatest attention to human rights issues.

³ Alternative verbs synonymous in meaning and function to 给予 **jǐyǔ/gěiyǔ** or 给与 **jǐyǔ/gěiyǔ** are 给以 **gěiyǐ**, 予以 **yǔyǐ** and 致以 **zhìyǐ**, the last of which is used more often with 敬礼 **jìnglǐ** ‘salute’.

Chapter 18

Modal verbs

Modal verbs are a closed set of verbs that are used immediately before the main verb in a sentence to reflect the mood or attitude of either the speaker or the subject of the sentence from the perspective of the speaker. This speaker-oriented stance makes all utterances that incorporate modal verbs evaluative in nature,¹ which means that these verbs, like those in expository sentences, do not occur with aspect markers.

In the first section below, we review all the modal verbs in the language in their semantic categories.

¹ See [Chapter 20](#) on different sentence types.

18.1 Semantic categories of modal verbs

18.1.1 Permission

可以 *kěyǐ* ‘may; be allowed to’ or 能 *néng* ‘can; be able to’:

你可以走了。 *nǐ kěyǐ zǒu le*
(lit. you may leave *le*) You may leave now.

他也可以回家了。 *tā yě kěyǐ huíjiā le*
(lit. he also may return-home *le*) He may go home as well.

能 *néng* is used interchangeably with 可以 *kěyǐ*, particularly in questions:

我能走了吗？ *wǒ néng zǒu le ma*
(lit. I can leave *le ma*) May I leave now?

他可以回家了吗？ *tā kěyǐ huíjiā le ma*
(lit. he may return-home *le ma*) Can he go home?

来宾可(以)不可以²在这儿停车?

láibīn kě(yǐ) bù kěyǐ zài zhèr tíng chē

(lit. guest may-not-may cv:at here stop-car)

May guests park here?

² The affirmative-negative question format of a disyllabic modal verb like 可以 kěyǐ can be either 可以不可以 kěyǐ bù kěyǐ or increasingly 可不可以 kě bù kěyǐ, with the second syllable of the modal omitted before the repetition.

In negative statements, 不能 bù néng, probably for rhythmic reasons, is colloquially more often used than 不可以 bù kěyǐ:

你不能走。 **nǐ bù néng zǒu**

(lit. you not can leave) You can't go now.

In set expressions with a classical tone, 可 kě or 以 yǐ may be used as individual modal verbs:

无可奉告 **wú kě fènggào** or 无以奉告 **wú yǐ fènggào**

(lit. nothing can respectfully tell)

No comment. (i.e. there is nothing that I may tell you)

千万不可掉以轻心。

qiānwàn bù kě diào yǐ qīng xīn

(lit. by all means not may let-drop light-heart)

Don't under any circumstances lower your guard!

18.1.2 Possibility

能 néng or 能够 nénggòu 'can' and 可以 kěyǐ 'be possible' also express possibility, in the sense of someone being able to do something on a particular occasion:

你能帮我把这个箱子抬起来吗?

nǐ néng bāng wǒ bǎ zhèi ge xiāngzi tái qǐlai ma

(lit. you can help me cv:grasping this mw box/case

(two-people-)lift-up **ma**)

Can you help me lift this case?

你能(够)不能够替我翻译一下这句话?

nǐ néng(gòu) bù nénggòu tì wǒ fānyì yīxià zhèi jù huà

(lit. you can-not-can cv:for me translate one mw:occasion this mw:sentence words)

Can you translate this sentence for me?

Generally, 能 *néng* or 能够 *nénggòu* ‘can’ and 可以 *kěyǐ* ‘be possible’ are used in the sense of permission in questions with first person or third person subjects, and in the sense of possibility in questions with second person or inanimate subjects. As far as statements are concerned, context usually disambiguates any confusion that may arise between possibility and permission:

你能把胡椒粉递给我吗?

nǐ néng bǎ hújiāofěn dì gěi wǒ ma

(lit. you can cv:grasping pepper-powder pass-give me *ma*)

Can you pass me the pepper, please?

你明天可以在会上发言吗?

nǐ míngtiān kěyǐ zài huì shàng fāyán ma

(lit. you tomorrow be-possible cv:at meeting-on give-speech *ma*)

Is it possible for you to give a speech at tomorrow’s meeting?

这种病能治好吗?

zhèi zhǒng bìng néng zhì hǎo ma

(lit. this kind illness can cure-recover *ma*)

Can this kind of illness be cured?

他的感冒已经好了，可以参加比赛了。

tāde gǎnmào yǐjīng hǎo le | kěyǐ cānjiā bǐsài le

(lit. his flu already well *le*, can take-part-in race *le*)

He has already recovered from his flu and can take part in the race.

18.1.3 Probability

会 *huì* ‘is likely to, may’ usually invites the presence of the particle 的 *de* at the end of the sentence:

她会来的。

tā huì lái de

(lit. she probable come *de*)

She will probably come.

他不会骗我的。

tā bùhuì piàn wǒ de

(lit. he not probable deceive me *de*)

He won’t lie to me.

Where another particle like 吗 *ma* or 了 *le* is used, it replaces 的 *de*:

明天会下雨吗? **míngtiān huì xià yǔ ma**

(lit. tomorrow probable fall-rain *ma*) Is it likely to rain tomorrow?

她会来吗? **tā huì lái ma**

(lit. she probable come *ma*) Will she come?

她不会来了。 **tā bùhuì lái le**

(lit. she not probable come *le*) Probably she won't turn up now.

Probability or likelihood, which is not simply chance, but imminent or planned, is expressed by 要 *yào* 'about to', often with a monosyllabic adverb such as 就 *jiù* 'soon' or 快 *kuài* 'quickly' preceding it and the particle 了 *le* at the end of the sentence to confirm the sense of change of circumstances:

(天)要下雨了。 **(tiān) yào xià yǔ le**

(lit. sky about-to fall-rain *le*)

It is about to rain.

火车就要开了。 **huǒchē jiù yào kāi le**

(lit. train soon about-to start *le*)

The train is just about to leave.

工程快要结束了吗? **gōngchéng kuài yào jiéshù le ma**

(lit. engineering project quickly about-to finish *le ma*)

Will the project soon be finished?

If the probability is based on scientific findings or is within human control, 可能 *kěnéng* 'be possible' is used:

北极的冰山可能融化吗?

běijí de bīngshān kěnéng rónghuà ma

(lit. North Pole *de* iceberg possible melt *ma*)

Are the icebergs at the North Pole going to melt?

全球可能出现经济萧条。

quánqiú kěnéng chūxiàn jīngjì xiāotiáo

(lit. whole globe possible appear economic depression)

The whole world is likely to go into an economic depression.

你可能出席这次会议吗?

nǐ kěnéng chūxí zhè cì huìyì ma

(lit. you possible be-present-at this mw:time meeting *ma*)

Are you going to be able to attend this meeting?

18.1.4 Ability or skill

能 *néng* ‘can’ and 能够 *nénggòu* ‘be able to’ convey general and physical capability, and are often used with a quantitative measurement:

我一次能喝三杯啤酒。

wǒ yī cì néng hē sān bēi píjiǔ

(lit. I at-one-time can drink three glasses beer)

I can drink three glasses of beer at one go.

你能够一只手把这个杠铃举起来吗？

nǐ nénggòu yī zhī shǒu bǎ zhèi ge gànglíng jǔ qǐlái ma

(lit. you can one mw hand cv:grasping this mw barbell lift-up *ma*)

Can you lift this barbell with one hand?

会 *huì*, on the other hand, indicates acquired skills:

她会打太极拳。 **tā huì dǎ tàijíquán**

(lit. she can hit *taiji* boxing) She can do shadow-boxing.

你会游泳吗？ **nǐ huì yóuyóu ma**

(lit. you can swim *ma*) Can you swim?

我不会说法语。 **wǒ bùhuì shuō fǎyǔ**

(lit. I not can speak French) I can't speak French.

18.1.5 Obligation

Moral obligation is usually expressed by 应该 *yīnggāi* ‘ought to’ or its alternatives 应当 *yīngdāng* (more emphatic), 应 *yīng* (classical), 该 *gāi* (colloquial) and 当 *dāng* (in parallelisms):

你应该支持她。 **nǐ yīnggai zhīchí tā**

(lit. you ought-to support her)

You ought to support her.

你应当好好地对待他。 **nǐ yīngdāng hǎohǎo de duìdài tā**

(lit. you ought-to well-well *de* treat him)

You ought to treat him well.

你应该记住这点。 **nǐ yīng jìzhù zhèi diǎn**

(lit. you should remember-firmly this point)

You must always remember this point.

我该走了。wǒ gāi zǒu le

(lit. I should leave *le*)

I must be off now.

当说就得说。dāng shuō jiù děi shuō

(lit. should say then should say)

What should be said should be said.

这件事我应(该)不应该告诉他?

zhèi jiàn shì wǒ yīng(gāi) bù yīnggāi gào su tā

(lit. this mw matter I should-not-should tell him)

Should I tell him about this?

这件事你不该怪他。zhèi jiàn shì nǐ bù gāi guài tā

(lit. this mw matter you not should blame him)

You should not (have) blame(d) him for this.

Compulsory obligation, on the other hand, is expressed by 必须 *bìxū* ‘must’ or 须要 *xūyào* ‘have to’:

你必须服从命令。nǐ *bìxū* fú cóng mìng lìng

(lit. you must obey command)

You must obey orders.

我们必须马上离开。wǒ men *bìxū* mǎ shàng lí kāi

(lit. we must immediately leave)

We must [i.e. we are supposed to] leave immediately.

他必须准时赶到。tā *bìxū* zhǔn shí gǎn dào

(lit. he must punctually hurry-arrive)

He must get there in time.

这个问题须要仔细考虑。zhèi ge wèn tí xū yào zǐ xì kǎo lǜ

(lit. this mw problem has to carefully consider)

This problem has to be carefully considered.

To negate compulsory obligation, 不 *bù* is not used with 必须 *bìxū* but in the following formulations:

不得	<i>bùdé</i>	not supposed to
不准	<i>bùzhǔn</i>	forbidden to
不要	<i>bùyào</i>	don't
不可以	<i>bù kěyǐ</i>	not allowed to; may not
不可	<i>bù kě</i>	not permitted
不能够	<i>bù nénggòu</i>	cannot

In emphatic warnings or exhortations, 不可 **bù kě** ‘not permitted’ occurs as a sentence terminal in conjunction with 非 **fēi** ‘not’ or 非得 **fēiděi** ‘have got to’,³ which is placed before the main verb. The two negative expressions convey a strongly positive meaning:

你非来不可。 **nǐ fēi lái bù kě**

(lit. you not come not possible) You have to come.

这篇文章非看不可。 **zhè piān wénzhāng fēi kàn bù kě**

(lit. this mw essay not look not possible) You have to read this essay.

这件事你非得去处理不可。⁴ **zhè jiàn shì nǐ fēiděi qù chǔlǐ bù kě**

(lit. this mw matter you not must go deal-with not possible)

You have to go and sort this matter out.

³ See §18.1.8 below.

⁴ In fact, 非得 **fēiděi** may sometimes go before the subject to highlight it, e.g.: 这件事非得你去处理不可。 **zhè jiàn shì fēiděi nǐ qù chǔlǐ bù kě** (lit. this mw matter not must you go deal-with not possible) ‘It’s you who’ll have to go and sort this matter out’.

18.1.6 Wishing

A mild wish is usually expressed by 想 **xiǎng** ‘would like’ or ‘to be thinking of’, while a strong desire is conveyed by 要 **yào** ‘want’. Compare the following:

今晚我想去看电影。 **jīnwǎn wǒ xiǎng qù kàn diànyǐng**

(lit. tonight I would-like go see film)

I would like to go and see a film tonight.

今晚我要去看电影。 **jīnwǎn wǒ yào qù kàn diànyǐng**

(lit. tonight I want go see film)

I want to go and see a film tonight.

In questions, 想 **xiǎng** and 要 **yào** are virtually interchangeable:

你想喝点儿什么? **nǐ xiǎng hē diǎnr shénme**

(lit. you would-like drink mw:some what)

What would you like to drink?

你要喝点儿什么? **nǐ yào hē diǎnr shénme**

(lit. you want drink mw:some what)

What do you want to drink?

For more explicit intentions, verbs like 打算 *dǎsuàn* ‘to plan to’, 准备 *zhǔnbèi* ‘to prepare, plan to’, and 决定 *juéding* ‘to decide to’ are used:⁵

今晚你打算做什么？

jīnwǎn nǐ dǎsuàn zuò shénme

(lit. this evening you plan do what)

What are you planning to do tonight?

今晚你准备去看电影吗？

jīnwǎn nǐ zhǔnbèi qù kàn diànyǐng ma

(lit. this evening you prepare go see film *ma*)

Are you planning to go and see a film tonight?

今晚我决定待在家里。

jīnwǎn wǒ juéding dāi zài jiā li

(lit. this evening I decide stay cv:at home-inside)

I have decided to stay at home tonight.

⁵ See §17.1.1.

The negatives of 想 *xiǎng* and 要 *yào* carry the flavour of disinclination for the former and refusal for the latter:

今晚我不想吃鱼。 **jīnwǎn wǒ bù xiǎng chī yú**

(lit. tonight I not like eat fish)

I don't want (to eat) fish tonight. [I don't fancy the prospect]

今晚我不要吃鱼。 **jīnwǎn wǒ bù yào chī yú**

(lit. tonight I not want eat fish)

I don't want (to eat) fish tonight. [I am against the idea]

One feature of 想 *xiǎng* ‘would like’ is that like 愿意 *yuànyì* ‘be willing to’ (see below) it may be modified by degree adverbs like 很 *hěn* ‘very much’, 正 *zhèng* ‘at this very moment, just’, or 不大 *bùdà* ‘not really’, 只 *zhǐ* ‘only’:

我很想去见见他。 **wǒ hěn xiǎng qù jiànjiàn tā**

(lit. I very-much like go see-see him)

I'd very much like to go and see him.

我正想去找您。 **wǒ zhèng xiǎng qù zhǎo nín**

(lit. I just want go look-for you)

I was just thinking of going to find you.

今晚我不大想出去。 **jīnwǎn wǒ bù dà xiǎng chūqu**

(lit. tonight I not very-much want out-go)

I don't really want to go out tonight.

我只想好好地休息休息。

wǒ zhǐ xiǎng hǎohǎo de xiūxi xiūxi

(lit. I only want well-well **de** rest-rest)

I just want to have a good rest.

18.1.7 Willingness

愿意 **yuànyì** ‘be willing’ or 肯 **kěn** ‘be willing (after some persuasion or with some reluctance)’:

我愿意帮助你。 **wǒ yuànyì bāngzhù nǐ**

(lit. I willing help you)

I am willing to help you.

他肯参加吗？ **tā kěn cānjiā ma**

(lit. he willing take-part **ma**)

Is he willing to take part?

Like 想 **xiǎng** ‘would like’ (see above), 愿意 **yuànyì** may also be modified by degree adverbs:

她很愿意帮你的忙。 **tā hěn yuànyì bāng nǐde máng**

(lit. she very willing help your busy)

She is very willing to help you.

他不大愿意坐火车去。 **tā bù dà yuànyì zuò huǒchē qù**

(lit. he not very-much willing cv: travel-by train go)

He is not really willing to go by train.

18.1.8 Necessity

得 **děi** ‘to have to, must’ is used in colloquial speech to indicate necessity and is often interchangeable with the modal verbs of moral or compulsory obligation:

我得走了。 **wǒ děi zǒu le**

(lit. I have to leave **le**)

I’ll have to go/I must be off.

有意见得说出来。 **yǒu yìjiàn děi shuō chūlai**

(lit. have opinion have to say out-come)

If you have an opinion, you must speak.

得 **děi** is never used in the negative, but it does appear with 不 **bù** in more formal statements, notices, etc., when it is pronounced **dé**:

闲人不得入内。 **xiánrén bùdé rù nèi**

(lit. outsiders not have-to enter inside)

No admittance./Private [i.e. outsiders should not enter the premises]

The negative for necessity is expressed by 不必 **bù bì**, 不用 **bù yòng**, 无须 **wúxū** ‘need not’:

你不必去了。 **nǐ bù bì qù le**

(lit. you not necessary go **le**) You don’t have to go.

你不用等我了。 **nǐ bù yòng děng wǒ le**

(lit. you not need wait-for me **le**) You needn’t wait for me.

你无须出席。 **nǐ wúxū chūxí**

(lit. you not must be-present)

There’s no need for you to be present./You’re not obliged to be there.

需要 **xūyào** ‘need’ is originally a full verb, but it may also take on a modal function before the verb 有 **yǒu** to indicate ‘necessity’:

人人都需要有社会公德。 **rénrén duō xūyào yǒu shèhuì gōngdé**

(lit. everybody all need have society public-morality)

Everybody needs to have a public spirit.

18.1.9 Boldness

敢 **gǎn** ‘dare’.

你敢打人吗？ **nǐ gǎn dǎ rén ma**

(lit. you dare hit people **ma**) How dare you hit people?

我不敢走黑路。 **wǒ bù gǎn zǒu hēilù**

(lit. I not dare walk dark roads) I dare not walk in the dark.

18.2 Speaker perspective of modal verbs

The speaker-oriented nature of modal verbs can be seen clearly in the case of 要 **yào** ‘to want’. When used with a first person subject (who is naturally the speaker), it indicates a wish on the part of the speaker:

我要喝点儿水。 **wǒ yào hē diǎnr shuǐ**

(lit. I want drink mw:some water) I’ll have/I’d like some water.

But it takes on a different meaning if the subject is in the second person:

你要喝点儿水。 **nǐ yào hē diǎnr shuǐ**

(lit. you must drink mw:some water)

You should drink some water.

Here the speaker is not voicing the listener's wish, but his or her own, and is advising or urging the listener to take the action.

However, if the two sentences are expressed as questions, the meanings of 'want' and 'should' may be reversed:

你要喝点儿水吗？ **nǐ yào hē diǎnr shuǐ ma**

(lit. you want drink mw:some water **ma**)

Do you want to drink some water?

我要喝点儿水吗？ **wǒ yào hē diǎnr shuǐ ma**

(lit. I must drink mw:some water **ma**)

Should I drink some water?

The interrogative has naturally switched the roles of the speaker and the listener, and the emphasis is on the listener's attitude rather than the speaker's.

18.3 Negation of modal verbs

Because the function of a modal verb is to indicate mood or attitude, its negator is always 不 **bù** 'not' (or the more classical 无 **wú** 'not' in some cases) and never 没 **méi** or 没有 **méiyǒu**, even if it is referring to a mood or attitude in the past.

不 **bù** 'not' is most commonly placed before the modal verb, but it can also be used after the modal verb (and before the main verb), where it conveys a different meaning:

你不可以走。 **nǐ bù kěyǐ zǒu**

(lit. you not may leave)

You may not go. [i.e. you are not allowed to go]

你可以不走。 **nǐ kěyǐ bù zǒu**

(lit. you may not leave)

You may stay. [i.e. you are allowed not to leave]

他不肯去。 **tā bù kěn qù**

(lit. he not willing go) He is not willing to go.

他肯不去。 **tā kěn bù qù**

(lit. he willing not go)

He is willing not to go. [i.e. he is willing to stay behind]

她不敢来。 **tā bù gǎn lái**

(lit. she not dare come) She dare not come. [a statement]

她敢不来? **tā gǎn bù lái**

(lit. she dare not come) Dare she not turn up! [a threat]

However, sentences with the negative after the modal verb sometimes need a degree of modification in order to be acceptable:

他不要喝牛奶。 **tā bù yào hē niú nǎi**

(lit. he not want drink milk) He doesn't want to drink (any) milk.

*他要不要喝牛奶。 **tā yào bù hē niú nǎi**

*(lit. he want not drink milk) *He wants not to drink milk.

but:

他要三天不喝牛奶。 **tā yào sān tiān bù hē niú nǎi**

(lit. he want three days not drink milk)

He wants to stop drinking milk for three days.

and:

她不应该抽烟。 **tā bù yīng gāi chōu yān**

(lit. she not should suck cigarette) She shouldn't smoke.

*她应该不抽烟。 **tā yīng gāi bù chōu yān**

*(lit. she should not suck cigarette)

but:

她应该从此不抽烟。 **tā yīng gāi cóng cǐ bù chōu yān**

(lit. she should from now not suck cigarette)

She should stop smoking from now on.

不 **bù** can, of course, be used both before the modal verb and before the main verb to indicate a double negative:

你不可以不走。 **nǐ bù kě yǐ bù zǒu**

(lit. you not may not leave)

You must go. [i.e. you are not allowed to stay]

他不肯不去。 **tā bù kěn bù qù**

(lit. he not willing not go) He insists on going.

18.4 Grammatical orientation of modal verbs

The incorporation of a modal verb in a sentence automatically makes the sentence evaluative,⁶ since it expresses a subjective observation on the part of a named or unnamed speaker. The sentence takes the form of a topic + comment structure, with the modal verb introducing the comment:

你 || 应该帮助他。 **nǐ || yīnggāi bāngzhù tā**
(lit. you ought to help him) You ought to help him.

⁶ See Chapter 20 in particular.

Here, 你 **nǐ** ‘you’ is not the subject of a narrative sentence initiating the action of ‘helping’, and there is no certainty that 你 **nǐ** will ever carry out the action. Instead, 你 **nǐ** ‘you’ is the topic and 应该帮助他 **yīnggāi bāngzhù tā** ‘must help him’ is the comment. The speaker’s intention is to comment on what 你 **nǐ** ‘you’ should do.

Because of this topic–comment relationship, a sentence like the following is possible:

药 || 应该准时吃。 **yào || yīnggāi zhǔnshí chī**
(lit. medicine must on-time eat)
Medicine should be taken at the right time.

In this case, 药 **yào** ‘medicine’ obviously does not initiate the action of ‘taking’, but it is a topic followed by a comment relating to it.

In addition to being a noun or pronoun, the topic can naturally take any syntactic form:

懒惰 || 会妨碍你的进步。 (topic = adjective)
lǎnduò || huì fáng’ài, nǐde jìnbù
(lit. lazy mv: may hamper your progress)
Being lazy may hamper your progress./If you’re lazy, it may hamper your progress.

经常锻炼身体 || 能增进健康。 (topic = verb phrase)
jīngcháng duànliàn shēntǐ || néng zēngjìn jiànkāng
(lit. regularly exercising body mv:can improve health)
Regular exercises can improve health.

大家都坐经济舱 || 可以节省不少开支。 (topic = clause)
dàjiā dōu zuò jīngjì cāng || kěyǐ jiéshěng bùshǎo kāizhī
(lit. everyone all sit-in economy cabin mw:can save not a little expenses)
Everyone can save a lot of expense travelling economy.

Telescopic constructions

By telescopic constructions, we mean constructions where one subject–predicate or topic–comment sentence is seen to be embedded in or interwoven with another.

In the next chapter, we discuss the distinctive features of different sentence types such as narrative, descriptive, expository and evaluative. Telescopic constructions, though they may take the form of any of these sentence types, are themselves generally expository or evaluative. In other words, the first part of a telescopic construction, whatever its formulation, is by definition, a topic presented for explanation or comment.

In the following sections, we will describe the different kinds of telescopic construction commonly encountered in the language.

19.1 Topic and sub-topic

The typical format of a topic and sub-topic construction is that the topic once stated is immediately followed by a sub-topic, which semantically has a part–whole relationship with the topic. The comment that follows is of course closely related to the sub-topic, which is its immediate focus of interest. However, because of the part–whole meaning relationship between the topic and the sub-topic, the comment relates to the topic and the sub-topic together.

她脾气很坏。 **tā píqì hěn huài**

(lit. she temper very bad) She has a bad temper.

这两个孩子身体都很好。 **zhè liǎng ge háizi shēntǐ dōu hěn hǎo**

(lit. these two mw children body both very good)

These two children are in good health.

In these examples 脾气 **píqì** ‘temperament’ is clearly part of 她 **tā** ‘her’ and 身体 **shēntǐ** ‘body; health’ is part of 孩子 **háizi** ‘the children’. There may be multiple and varied parts to a whole:

这件衣服，领子太大，袖子太短。

zhèi jiàn yīfu | lǐngzi tài dà | xiùzi tài duǎn

(lit. this mw clothes, collar too big, sleeves too short)

The collar on this suit is too big and the sleeves too short.

他妻子仪表端庄，谈吐文雅，举止大方。

tā qīzi yíbiǎo duānzhuāng | tánǔ wényǎ | jǔzhǐ dàfang

(lit. his wife bearing dignified, conversation refined, manner poised)

His wife’s bearing is dignified, her conversation refined and her manner poised.

这些水果，一半给你，一半给你弟弟。

zhèixiē shuǐguǒ | yī bàn gěi nǐ | yī bàn gěi nǐ dìdì

(lit. these mw fruit, one half give you, one half give your younger brother)

Half of these fruit are for you and half for your brother.

来这儿度假的游客，大部分是英国人，小部分是法国人。

lái zhèr dùjià de yóukè | dà bùfēn shì yīngguó rén | xiǎo bùfēn shì fǎguó rén

(lit. come here pass holiday **de** tourists, majority are English, minority are French)

The majority of the tourists who come here for holidays are British and the minority French.

我们花园里的水仙花，有的是黄的，有的是白的。

wǒmen huāyuán lǐ de shuǐxiānhuā | yǒude shì huáng de | yǒude shì bái de

(lit. our garden-inside **de** narcissus, some are yellow **de**, some are white **de**) Some of the narcissus in our garden are yellow and some white.

A common relationship between topic and sub-topic is that of initiator and activity. The comment that follows may refer to the initiator-topic or the sub-topic activity. Such flexibility broadens the choice of comment:

他学习很出色。 **tā xuéxí hěn chūsè**

(lit. he study very outstanding) He is an outstanding student.

他学习很认真。 **tā xuéxí hěn rènzhēn**

(lit. he study very conscientious) He is a conscientious student.

It is obvious that 出色 *chūsè* ‘outstanding’ refers to the sub-topic 学习 *xuéxí* ‘studies’, while 认真 *rènzhēn* ‘conscientious’ describes the topic 他 *tā* ‘him’.

The sub-topic activity may again be multiple:

小黄不但学习认真，而且工作积极。

xiǎo huáng bùdàn xuéxí rènzhēn | érqǐě gōngzuò jījī

(lit. little Huang not only study conscientious but also work vigorous)

Little Huang not only studies conscientiously, but he also works hard.

这个球员，进攻勇猛，防守稳健。

zhèi ge qiúyuán | jìngōng yǒngměng | fángshǒu wěnjiàn

(lit. this mw player attack bold defend firm)

This player is bold in attack and firm in defence.

19.2 Topic and subject

It is not uncommon in a *le*-expository sentence¹ for a topic and subject to appear together. For example:

信 || 我 | 早就寄走了。 **xìn || wǒ | zǎo jiù jì zǒu le**

(lit. letter | early then send-go *le*)

I've sent the letter some time ago.

我的论文 || 导师 | 已经看过了。

wǒde lùnwén || dǎoshī | yǐjīng kàn guo le

(lit. my thesis supervisor/tutor already see *guo le*)

My supervisor/tutor has already read through my thesis.

¹ See Chapter 21, where *le*-expository sentences are discussed in greater detail.

In the first example, 信 *xìn* ‘the letter’ is the topic, whereas 我 *wǒ* ‘I’ is the subject that initiates the action of 寄 *jì* ‘sending’ in the predicate; and in the second, 论文 *lùnwén* ‘the dissertation’ is the topic, while 导师 *dǎoshī* is the subject initiating the action of 看 *kàn* ‘reading’ in the predicate. Semantically speaking, 信 *xìn* ‘the letter’ and 论文 *lùnwén* ‘the dissertation’ are respectively the notional object of the verbs 寄 *jì* ‘to send’ and 看 *kàn* ‘to read’.

This being the case, these *le*-expository sentences are easily reconvertible to their narrative originals, with end-of-sentence 了 *le* as an expository

indicator changing to aspect indicator 了 *le* to mark that the actions have been completed:

我早就寄走了那封²信。

wǒ zǎo jiù jì zǒu le nài fēng xìn

(lit. I early then send-go *le* that mw letter) I had long since sent that letter.

导师已经看过³了我的论文。

dǎoshī yǐjīng kàn guo le wǒde lùnwén

(lit. supervisor/tutor already read *guo le* my thesis)

The supervisor/tutor had already read through my thesis.

² 那封 *nài fēng* ‘that + measure word for a letter’ are added here to counteract the post-verbal indefinite reference of a narrative sentence and also to provide rhythmic balance.

³ Note the difference between 过 *guò* ‘to have read through’ as a resultative complement in this sentence and 过 *guo* ‘to have had the experience of’ as an expository indicator in a sentence like 导师看过我的论文 *dǎoshī kàn guo wǒde lùnwén* ‘The tutor has read my thesis’.

In fact, *le*-expository sentences are conversions from corresponding narrative sentences, topicalising the original object, dismantling the straightforward ‘initiator + action + target’ narrative format or its 把 *bǎ* or 被 *bèi* derivatives, and shifting the perspective from recounting a past action to explaining a present situation with the addition of an end-of-sentence 了 *le* or other relevant particles. Here are some more examples:

这件事 || 大家 | 都知道了。

zhèi jiàn shì || dàjiā | dōu zhīdao le

(lit. this mw matter everyone all know *le*) Everyone knows about this.

八点钟的火车 || 我 | 赶不上了。

bā diǎn zhōng de huǒchē || wǒ | gǎnbushàng le

(lit. eight o'clock *de* train I catch not up *le*)

I can't catch the eight o'clock train.

那条裙子 || 妹妹 | 送给她的朋友了。

nèi tiáo qúnzi || mèimei | sòng gěi tāde péngyou le

(lit. that mw skirt younger sister present-give her friend *le*)

Younger sister has given that skirt to her friend.

那场大火 || 消防队员 | 很快就扑灭了。

nèi chǎng dàhuǒ || xiāofáng duìyuán | hěn kuài jiù pū miè le

(lit. that mw big fire fire brigade very fast then extinguish *le*)

The fire brigade very quickly put out that blaze.

圣诞礼物 || 我 | 早就买了。 **shèngdàn lǐwù || wǒ | zǎo jiù mǎi le**
(lit. Christmas presents I early then buy **le**)
I bought my Christmas presents a long time ago.

There are also topics derived from nominal items taken as the main focus of interest in multi-valency sentences. This is to say that the comment on the topic may take the form of a subject and verb-object predicate. For example:

花儿 || 我 | 浇了水了。 **huār || wǒ | jiāo le shuǐ le**
(lit. flowers I sprinkle **le** water **le**) I have watered the flowers.

水 || 我 | 浇了花儿了。 **shuǐ || wǒ | jiāo le huār le**
(lit. water I sprinkle **le** flowers **le**)
I have watered the flowers with the water.

车库的门 || 我 | 上了漆了。
chēkù de mén || wǒ | shàng le qī le
(lit. garage **de** door I put on **le** paint **le**)
I have painted the garage door.

漆 || 我 | 用来油了车库的门了。
qī || wǒ | yòng lái yóu le chēkù de mén le
(lit. paint I use-come paint **le** garage **de** door **le**)
I have used the paint to paint the garage door.

19.3 'Subject + predicate' as topic

A subject + predicate clause can also act as the topic of a topic + comment evaluative sentence,⁴ with the predicate verb being unmarked. This plain structure contrasts with the variety of grammatical patterns required by English translations:

老年人少吃盐对身体有好处。
lǎoniánrén shǎo chī yán duì shēntǐ yǒu hǎochu
(lit. old people little eat salt cv:for body have benefit)
If old people eat less salt, it is good for their health.
It is good for the health of old people to eat less salt.

你这么做太不象话了。 **nǐ zhème zuò tài bù xiàng huà le**
(lit. you like this do too shocking/unreasonable **le**)
It was really shocking/unreasonable for you to have done this.

⁴ See next chapter.

这个小伙子当翻译真行。

zhèi ge xiǎohuǒzi dāng fānyì zhēn xíng

(lit. this young man be interpreter really good)

It is really good that this young man is the interpreter.

If the subject of this topical ‘subject + predicate’ structure is of a general or universal nature, it may be left out. What remains of the topic will now be an unmarked, unmodified verb predicate. For example:

下雨天划艇没有什么意思。

xiàyǔtiān huá tǐng méiyǒu shénme yìsi

(lit. fall rain day row boat have not any interest)

There is no interest at all in going rowing on a rainy day.

到国外去度假可以增进见闻。

dào guówài qù dùjià kěyǐ zēngjìn jiànwén

(lit. cv.to country-outside go pass holiday can promote see-hear)

Going on holidays abroad can add to one’s knowledge.

19.4 ‘(Subject) + predicate’ inserted between ‘topic’ and ‘comment’

In this structure, a subject + predicate clause is placed between the topic and the comment, usually to create an expository or evaluative sentence. In many cases, the subject is absent or understood, and the predicate is always complemented by the descriptive indicator 着 *zhe* or a directional indicator 来 *lái* or 起来 *qǐlái*. The clause carries an underlying conditional meaning.

这双鞋你穿着正合适。

zhèi shuāng xié nǐ chuān zhe zhèng héshì

(lit. this mw:pair shoes you wear zhe just suit)

These shoes fit you beautifully/well.

那双鞋太紧，穿着不舒服。

nèi shuāng xié tài jǐn | chuān zhe bù shūfu

(lit. that mw:pair shoes too tight, wear zhe not comfortable)

Those shoes are too tight and would be uncomfortable to wear.

这个人看着很面熟。

zhèi ge rén kàn zhe hěn miànshú

(lit. this mw person look zhe very face-familiar)

This man looks very familiar.

这个箱子提着有些沉。

zhèi ge xiāngzi tí zhe yǒuxiē chén

(lit. this mw case carry/lift **zhe** has some heavy)

This case is a bit heavy (to carry).

这种药吃下去就见效。

zhèi zhǒng yào chī xiàqu jiù jiànxào

(lit. this mw:kind medicine eat down-go then become effective)

Taking this medicine will do the trick/be effective.

那个老人看上去还很健壮。

nèi ge lǎorén kàn shàngqu hái hěn jiànzuàng

(lit. that mw old man look as if still very robust)

That old man looks as though he is still very robust.

这篇文章念起来不顺口。

zhèi piān wénzhāng niàn qīlai bù shùnkǒu

(lit. this mw essay begin to read not smooth for mouth)

This essay does not read smoothly.

这种游戏看起来很简单，其实并不简单。

zhèi zhǒng yóuxì kàn qīlai hěn jiǎndān | qíshí bìng bù jiǎndān

(lit. this mw:kind game look as if very simple, in fact certainly not simple)

This game looks simple, but in fact it isn't.

Narration, description, exposition and evaluation

Chinese syntax follows the universal differentiation of sentences along the line of function into four major types: declarative, imperative, interrogative and exclamatory. However, being less morphologically oriented but more functionally disposed than some other languages, Chinese syntax may further differentiate its declarative sentences into the following four subtypes: narrative, descriptive, expository¹ and evaluative. Inevitably, there is blurring at the boundaries between subtypes, since the vagaries of language will always defy absolute demarcations. Nonetheless, this differentiation is of extreme importance because it highlights other essential grammatical distinctions that need to be made.

¹ Expository sentences, as we shall see in the next chapter, have an associated category that we label *le*-expository.

In this chapter, we will concentrate on the most distinctive features of each of these subtypes. However, before we go into greater detail on them, we will first of all give a very brief description of the grounds on which such a sub-categorisation is based.

A narrative sentence sets out to recount an incident or tell a story, and it therefore follows a 'subject + predicate' format, where the subject is the initiator or recipient of the action specified in the predicate. A narrative sentence is thus a stage in a sequence, encoding one action in a chain of actions, which comprise an overall event.

A descriptive sentence, though it follows a 'subject + predicate' format like a narrative, is nevertheless an objective depiction of an action that is ongoing at a particular time. The focus is on the continuous action.

An expository sentence aims to give an explanation. It may adopt either a 'subject + predicate' or 'topic + comment' format. In its 'subject + predicate' form, it makes a statement of what somebody does or can do

out of habit, experience or nature, and so on, or intends to do in the future. In a ‘topic + comment’, the comment consists of either the verb 是 *shì* ‘to be’ or 有 *yǒu* ‘to have’ or an unmodified verb or adjective. An expository sentence states either a fact or an intention.

An evaluative sentence, on the other hand, conveys an observation, an opinion, a subjective criticism or assessment. It always takes a ‘topic + comment’ format. If an action verb is used in the comment, it is preceded by a modal verb or followed by a *de*-complement; and if an adjective is present in the comment, it is modified by a degree adverb or followed by a degree complement. These modifications represent the element of evaluation or judgement in the statement.

In the following sections, the distinctive features of each of these four subtypes will be discussed in detail.

20.1 Narrative sentences

A narrative sentence reports an event or incident that has already taken place, and it generally recounts that somebody (or something) carried out (or caused) an action or that something happened to someone (or something) on some past occasion. If we define the ‘subject + predicate’ format as a typical syntactic representation of the concept of an initiator who initiates an action or a recipient who receives an action, then this format naturally comprises a narrative.

There are two prominent features of a narrative sentence in Chinese. First, since Chinese syntax lacks the category of definite and indefinite articles, nouns in the language depend either on context or on their position in the sentence for the specification of definite or indefinite reference. In a Chinese narrative sentence, all nouns in a pre-verbal position take on definite reference. Second, the verb in the predicate, being part of a narrative, and naturally indicating a completed action, is therefore generally marked by 了 *le*. Both these features are illustrated in the example below:

孩子从屋子里跑了出来。 *háizi cóng wūzi li pǎo le chūlai*
The child came out of the room.

The English translation makes clear that the noun 孩子 *háizi*, despite being unmarked and without any referential indication, is nevertheless of definite reference, and the action of coming out by the child, as indicated by the aspect marker 了 *le*, was obviously completed.

The corollary to this tendency of pre-verbal nouns to be definite-referenced is the fact that all nouns positioned post-verbally are liable to be of indefinite reference. Post-verbal nouns are in fact generally marked by a ‘numeral + measure’ phrase to confirm this indefiniteness:

屋子里跑出来(了)一个孩子。²

wūzi li pǎo chūlai (le) yī ge háizi

Out of the room came a child.

² 了 *le* in this sentence is optional for reasons of prosody (see [Chapter 26](#)). The sentence may also be reworded as 屋子里跑出一个孩子来。

The two sentences above therefore demonstrate the standard referential properties required for nouns by narrative syntax: pre-verbal definite, and post-verbal indefinite, but usually marked as such.

However, the subject of narrative sentences can have indefinite reference, even if marked by a ‘numeral + measure’ phrase, provided either:

- (a) the dummy verb 有 *yǒu* ‘to have’ is placed before it, so that it is still, in a sense, post-verbal:

有两个陌生人走了进来。

yǒu liǎng ge mòshēngrén zǒu le jìnlai

(lit. have two mw stranger walk *le* in-come)

Two strangers walked in.

有一辆轿车在门口停了下来。

yǒu yī liàng jiàochē zài ménkǒu tíng le xiàlai

(lit. have one mw sedan cv:at entrance stop *le* down-come)

A sedan stopped at the door.

or:

- (b) it is moved to a post-verbal position, where indefinite-reference nouns are normally found:³

那时候进来了两个陌生人。

nèi shíhòu jìn lái le liǎng ge mòshēngrén

(lit. that time come in *le* two mw stranger)

At that moment two strangers walked in/in walked two strangers.

门口开来了一辆轿车。ménkǒu kāi lái le yī liàng jiàochē

(lit. entrance drive-come *le* one mw sedan)

A sedan drove up to the door.

³ This is only possible if the action verb used is intransitive.

The same applies to a subject noun that is modified by a descriptive, i.e. adjectival attributive, since this modification automatically makes the noun indefinite:

有(一)个面孔圆圆的孩子从屋子里跑了出来。

yǒu (yī) ge miànkǒng yuányuán de háizi cóng wūzi lǐ pǎo le chūlai

or:

屋子里跑出来了一个面孔圆圆的孩子。

wūzi lǐ pǎo chūlai le yī ge miànkǒng yuányuán de háizi

A chubby-faced child came (running) out of the room.

If definite reference has to be expressed, this can be achieved in this case and in all cases by the addition of a ‘demonstrative + measure’ phrase:

那个面孔圆圆的孩子从屋子里跑了出来。

nèi ge miànkǒng yuányuán de háizi cóng wūzi lǐ pǎo le chūlai

That chubby-faced child came out of the room.

It should be noted that subject nouns that are marked as indefinite, but which are followed by the referential adverbs 都 *dōu* ‘all; both’ and 也 *yě* ‘also’, are perfectly acceptable in a pre-verbal position, since they are made definite in reference by the presence of the adverbs:

两个陌生人都走了进来。

liǎng ge mòshēngrén dōu zǒu le jìnlai

(lit. two mw strangers both walk *le* in-come)

The two strangers both walked in.

三辆轿车也在门口停了下来。

sān liàng jiàochē yě zài ménkǒu tíng le xiàlai

(lit. three mw sedan also cv:at entrance stop *le* down-come)

The three sedans also stopped at the door.

On the other hand, a post-verbal noun may be given definite reference by either:

- (a) introducing the standard ‘demonstrative + measure’ phrase before the noun:

我看了那个电影。 **wǒ kàn le nèi ge diànyǐng**

I saw that film.

他们讨论了这个问题。 **tāmen tāolùn le zhèi ge wèntí**

They discussed this problem.

or:

- (b) leaving the noun unmarked and adding a new clause begun with 就 jiù ‘then’ or 才 cái ‘only then’ to make the sentence sound complete:

我看了电影⁴就去赶最后一班车。

wǒ kàn le diànyǐng jiù qù gǎn zuì hòu yī bān chē

(lit. I see **le** film then go catch last one mw:run bus)

I went to catch the last bus as soon as I had seen **the** film.

她做完(了)功课才上楼去睡觉。

tā zuò wán (le) gōngkè cái shàng lóu qù shuìjiào

(lit. she do-finish **le** homework only-then step upstairs go sleep)

She did not go upstairs to bed until she had finished **the/her** homework.

⁴ All unmarked nouns as the object of an action verb aspect-marked by 了 **le** are of definite reference, but, as we saw in §6.8.1, a statement with this formulation is felt to be incomplete.

From the above examples, we can also see that point-of-time and location expressions with their specifying capacities are naturally of definite reference, as are personal pronouns, which refer to previously mentioned nouns. All of these are likewise generally found in pre-verbal positions in a narrative sentence:

上个星期我收到了几十封电子邮件。

shàng ge xīngqī wǒ shōudào le jǐ shí fēng diànzǐ yóujiàn

(lit. last week I receive **le** few ten mw emails)

Last week I received dozens of emails.

我们在花园里种了不少⁵玫瑰花。

wǒmen zài huāyuán lǐ zhòng le bùshǎo méiguīhuā

(lit. we cv:in garden-inside plant **le** not few roses)

We planted a good number of/quite a few roses in the garden.

他们下了两盘棋。**tāmen xià le liǎng pán qí**

(lit. they play **le** two mw games chess) They played two games of chess.

⁵ 不少 bùshǎo ‘quite a few’ is an adjective that naturally indicates indefiniteness.

Narrative sentences with time or location beginners often indicate ‘emergence’ or ‘disappearance’ relating to the noun in question:

昨天我家来了许多客人。**zuótiān wǒ jiā lái le xǔduō kèrén**

(lit. yesterday my home come **le** many guests)

A lot of guests came to our place yesterday.

上午下了一场大雨。shàngwǔ xià le yī cháng dà yǔ
(lit. before noon fall **le** one mw big rain)
There was a spell of heavy rain in the morning.

天边出现了一团乌云。tiān biān chūxiàn le yī tuán wūyún
(lit. sky edge appear **le** one mw:mass black clouds)
There appeared a mass of black clouds on the horizon.

羊圈里跑了一只羊。
yángjuàn li pǎo le yī zhī yáng
(lit. sheep-pen-in run **le** one mw sheep)
A sheep was missing from the pen.

海面上飞来了很多海鸥。
hǎimiàn shàng fēi lái le hěn duō hǎi'ōu
(lit. sea surface-on fly come **le** many gulls)
Many gulls came flying over the surface of the sea.

Apart from these prototypical narratives with noun phrases followed by 了 *le*-aspected action verbs, which are in turn followed by noun phrases or complements, there are other narrative formats such as the 把 *bǎ* construction and the passive voice with 被 *bèi*⁶ and sentences with dative or causative verbs. They may all be regarded as narrative sentences, as they normally indicate actions or events that have already taken place, and the above-mentioned referential requirements apply to them in the same way. However, these narrative sentences do not necessarily require the presence of 了 *le* since the notion of completion is very often conveyed by the complement following the verb.

In a 把 *bǎ* sentence, not only does the subject have definite reference, as in other narrative sentences, but the noun following the coverb 把 *bǎ* must also be definite in reference, as it is still positioned pre-verbally. For example:

爸爸把稿子扔进了字纸篓。bàba bǎ gǎozi rēng jìn le zìzhǐlǒu
(lit. father cv:grasping manuscript throw enter **le** wastepaper basket)
Father threw **the** manuscript into the wastepaper basket.

妈妈把洗好的⁷衣服晾在晾衣绳上。
māma bǎ xǐ hǎo de yīfú liàng zài liàngyīshéng shàng
(lit. mother cv:grasping wash well **de** clothes dry cv:on clothesline-top)
Mother put **the** washing out on the clothesline (to dry).

⁶ See Chapters 12 and 13.

⁷ The noun after 把 *bǎ*, marked or unmarked, always remains definite.

in the first sentence, both 爸爸 **bàba** ‘father’ and 稿子 **gǎozi** ‘manuscript’, and in the second, both 妈妈 **māma** ‘mother’ and 衣服 **yīfu** ‘clothes’ are of definite reference.

In a 被 **bèi** sentence, the noun following the coverb 被 **bèi** can be either definite or indefinite in reference depending on the context:

弟弟被老师训了一顿。 **dìdi bèi lǎoshī xùn le yī dùn**
(lit. younger brother cv:by teacher lecture **le** one mw:time)
Younger brother was given a lecture by **the** teacher.

Here, 弟弟 **dìdi** ‘younger brother’ and 老师 **lǎoshī** ‘teacher’ are both of definite reference; on the other hand, in a sentence like:

箱子被老鼠咬了一个洞。 **xiāngzi bèi lǎoshǔ yǎo le yī ge dòng**
(lit. box cv:by rat gnaw **le** one mw hole)
A hole was gnawed in the box by rats.

箱子 **xiāngzi** ‘box’ is of definite reference, but 老鼠 **lǎoshǔ** ‘rat’ can be of indefinite reference.

In dative and causative sentences, all unmarked nouns, that is, all nouns unmodified by a ‘numeral + measure’ phrase are of definite reference.

In a dative sentence, for example, the indirect object, being the personal target of the action of giving or rendering, is generally regarded as of definite reference and remains unmarked, and the direct object, which usually comes after the indirect object, is usually marked by a ‘numeral + measure’ phrase as indefinite:

老太太给了小姑娘一个苹果。
lǎo tài tai gěi le xiǎo gū niang yī ge píng guǒ
The old granny gave **the** young girl an apple.

流氓踢了警察一脚。 **liú máng tī le jǐng chá yī jiǎo**
(lit. hooligan kick **le** policeman one foot)
The hooligan kicked **the** policeman.

In a causative sentence, the pivotal noun, i.e. the object-and-subject-in-one, when unmarked,⁸ is usually of definite reference:

教练鼓励运动员坚持到底。 **jiàoliàn gǔlì yùndòngyuán jiānchí dào dǐ**
(lit. coach encourage athlete persist till bottom/end)
The coach encouraged **the** athlete(s) to persist till the end.

⁸ It must, however, be noted that a few commonly used pivotal nouns like 人 **rén** ‘people’, 别人 **bié rén** ‘others’, etc., which are indefinite, are exceptions to this.

老师指导学生做了一个实验。

lǎoshī zhǐdǎo xuésheng zuò le yī ge shíyàn

The teacher taught the students how to carry out a particular experiment.

One exceptional feature of a causative narrative is that the causative action verb may never take the completed action aspect marker 了 *le*.

*老师指导了学生做了一个实验。

***lǎoshī zhǐdǎo le xuésheng zuò le yī ge shíyàn**

*The teacher taught the students how to carry out a particular experiment.

Finally, with regard to completed action, it is of course possible for the aspect marker 了 *le* to be used with an intransitive action verb, which is not followed by a noun or which has a noun built into it:

她2000年就去世了。 **tā èrlínglínglíng nián jiù qùshì le**

She passed away in (the year) 2000.

建筑计划都批准了。 **jiànzhù jìhuà dōu pīzhǔn le**

The building plans were all approved.

The verbs in these sentences essentially point to some form of termination, and in varying degrees, they may carry some implication of assumed change, which is characteristic of the *le*-expository sentences to be discussed in the next chapter. In fact, there are clearly cases where 了 *le* following a verb at the end of a sentence is almost certainly performing the two functions of being both an aspect marker and indicator of change.⁹

⁹ See §21.5.

20.2 Descriptive sentences

A descriptive sentence differs from a narrative sentence in many respects, although it is also objective in stance. Rather than recounting what has already happened, it describes either: (a) what is going on through the action of the verb at the moment of speaking; or (b) a state that has resulted from the action of the verb. As with a narrative sentence, its structure is subject–predicate, though in the case of (b) the subject is more a recipient of the action, as in passive 被 *bei* structures in narrative sentences. The time reference depends on the context, and, while it is mostly the present, it can also be past and, sometimes, future.

The main syntactic feature of a descriptive sentence is that, as in narrative sentences, the verb tends to be marked. This is achieved through the association of the verb with the ‘ongoing’ aspect marker 在 *zài*¹⁰ (or its emphatic alternative 正在 *zhèngzài*) and the persistent manner indicator 着 *zhe*. 在 *zài* and 着 *zhe* in general terms represent respectively the alternative (a) and (b) forms of the descriptive sentence. However, as we shall see below, they can both occur in the same sentence.

¹⁰ See Chapter 6. The ongoing aspect may be indicated by 在 *zài* on its own or as part of an adverbial location phrase, e.g. 在树上 *zài shù shàng* ‘on/in the tree’.

As regards reference, the subject of a narrative sentence must be of definite reference, whereas the subject/topic of a descriptive sentence may be either definite or indefinite. The post-verbal noun of a descriptive sentence, however, whether marked by a ‘numeral + measure’ phrase or left unmarked, always remains indefinite unless it is preceded by a ‘demonstrative + measure’ phrase. Here are some examples:

王老师在备课。 **wáng lǎoshī zài bèikè**
(lit. teacher Wang marker: *zai* prepare lesson)
Teacher Wang is preparing [his/her] lessons.

姑娘们在舞台上跳舞。 **gūniangmen zài wǔtái shàng tiàowǔ**
(lit. (young) girls cv: on stage-top dance) The girls are dancing on the stage.

小鸟在树上歌唱。 **xiǎoniǎo zài shù shàng gēchàng**
(lit. (little) birds cv: on tree-top sing) Birds are singing in the trees.

他在草地上躺着。 **tā zài cǎodì shàng tǎng zhe**
(lit. he cv: on grass-land-top lie *zhe*) He is lying on the grass.

鱼在锅里煎着。 **yú zài guō lǐ jiān zhe**
(lit. fish cv: in pan-inside fry *zhe*) The fish is/are frying in the pan.

In the first example, 在 *zài* indicates ongoing action on the part of the subject. In the second and third, 在 *zài* as part of a coverbal location phrase again registers the ongoing action. The subjects of the first two examples are of definite reference, but the subject of the third is most likely to be of indefinite reference. In the fourth and fifth examples, 着 *zhe* is incorporated to indicate the persistent manner in which the action is being carried out.¹¹ In the last example, the subject 鱼 *yú* ‘fish’ is the recipient of the action of the verb 煎 *jiān* ‘to fry’.

¹¹ It is a prosodic requirement in Chinese syntax that in descriptive sentences 在 *zài* phrases of location cannot be followed by monosyllabic verbs. The speaker either chooses a disyllabic verb or a multi-syllabic verbal expression or suffixes 着 *zhe* to a monosyllabic verb to make it disyllabic.

Sometimes, as we have seen in [Chapter 8](#), a location phrase with 在 *zài* may come after the verb. These constructions are similarly descriptive sentences. For example:

伤员躺在担架上。 **shāngyuán tǎng zài dānjià shàng**

The wounded are lying on the stretcher.

商品陈列在橱窗里。 **shāngpǐn chénliè zài chúchuāng lǐ**

Goods are being displayed in the shop window.

Location expressions in a sentence are of course always of definite reference wherever they occur.

In a 着 *zhe* sentence, any verb marked by 着 *zhe* calls attention to the action itself, and therefore carries a descriptive flavour. As was suggested above, a descriptive sentence indicating a state that has resulted from the action of the verb often includes 着 *zhe*. The usual layout of the sentence is location phrase + action verb + 着 *zhe* + noun:

墙上挂着一幅画儿。 **qiáng shàng guà zhe yī fú huàr**

(lit. wall-on hang *zhe* one mw picture)

A picture is hanging on the wall.

书架上放着很多中文书。

shūjià shàng fàng zhe hěnduō zhōngwén shū

(lit. bookshelf-on place *zhe* many Chinese books)

There are many Chinese books on the bookshelf.

樱桃树上长着密密麻麻的樱花。

yīngtáo shù shàng zhǎng zhe mímímámá de yīnghuā

(lit. cherry tree-on grow *zhe* dense-dense-motley-motley *de* cherry blossoms)

There grow countless cherry blossoms on the cherry tree.

玫瑰园里散发着一股清香。 **méiguī yuán lǐ sànfā zhe yī gǔ qīngxiāng**

(lit. rose garden-in diffuse *zhe* one mw delicate fragrance)

There came a faint scent from the rose garden.

A variant of this descriptive format makes use of the completion aspect marker 了 *le* with or without the verbal complement 满 *mǎn* ‘full’¹² instead of 着 *zhe*. These sentences are regarded as descriptive rather than narrative, because the verb with 了 *le* calls attention to the resultant state and not the action:

大门上贴了一副对联。 **dà mén shàng tiē le yī fù duì lián**

(lit. big door-on stick *le* one mw:pair couplets)

On the door was (posted) a couplet.

¹² When 满 *mǎn* ‘full’ is used, the post-verbal noun cannot be marked by a ‘numeral + measure’ phrase.

屋檐下挂了两个灯笼。wūyán xià guà le liǎng ge dēnglóng
(lit. house eave-under hang **le** two mw lanterns)
Under the eaves were hanging two lanterns.

桌子上摆满了餐具。zhuōzi shàng bǎi mǎn le cānjù
(lit. table-on put full **le** meal instruments) The table was laid.

礼堂里坐满了听众。lǐtáng lǐ zuò mǎn le tīngzhòng
(lit. auditorium-in sit full **le** listening crowd) The auditorium was full.

车里挤满了乘客。chē lǐ jǐ mǎn le chéngkè
(lit. bus-in squeeze full **le** passengers) The bus was full of passengers.

20.3 Expository sentences

Expository sentences are factual statements that offer some form of explanation relating to actual situations or experiences. The aspect markers 了 **le** and 在 **zài** and the persistent manner indicator 着 **zhe** do not occur in them, and there are no rules or restrictions for the pre-verbal and post-verbal positioning of nouns for definite and indefinite reference. Their range of meaning covers: (a) definition and identification, and possession and existence; and (b) experience, objective potential, the factual and the habitual, cognition and intention. They may be either topic-comment or subject-predicate in format, and the categories of meaning under (a) above are generally the former and those under (b) the latter.

20.3.1 Topic-comment expository sentences

20.3.1.1 'To be' and 'to have'

Two verbs that have a dominant presence are 是 **shì** 'to be' and 有 **yǒu** 'to have, there is/are'. In addition, the near-synonymous or hyponymous counterparts of 是 **shì** (象 **xiàng** 'to resemble', 姓 **xìng** 'to be called'), also have a place:

他是我叔叔。	tā shì wǒ shūshu He is my uncle.
昆虫有六只脚。	kūnchóng yǒu liù zhī jiǎo Insects have six legs.
她象她妈妈。	tā xiàng tā māma She looks like her mother.
我姓张。	wǒ xìng zhāng My surname is Zhang.

As well as being nouns of definite or indefinite reference, topics may also adopt different parts of speech or take various forms:

地球是圓的。

dìqiú shì yuán de

The earth is round.

(noun: definite
reference)

蜘蛛有八只腳。

zhīzhū yǒu bā zhī jiǎo

Spiders have eight legs.

(noun: indefinite
reference)

月亮是地球的衛星。

yuèliang shì dìqiú de wèixīng

The moon is a satellite of the earth.

(noun: definite
reference)

這副眼鏡是我的。

zhèi fù yǎnjìng shì wǒ de

This pair of spectacles is mine.

(noun: definite
reference)

打太極拳是他的愛好之一。

dǎ tàijíquán shì tāde àihào zhī yī

(lit. hit *taiqi* boxing is his favourite *zhi* one)

One of his favourite sports is
taiqi/shadow-boxing.

(verbal phrase)

嚴格有很多好處。

yángé yǒu hěnduō hǎochù

(lit. strict has many benefits)

Being strict can be very productive.

(adjective)

辦事認真是她的一個特點。

bànshì rènzhēn shì tāde yī ge tèdiǎn

(lit. handle matters serious is her one mw
characteristic)

One of her characteristics is that she
handles things seriously.

(clause)

In addition to indicating definition, possession, etc., 是 *shì* or 有 *yǒu* are also used to express emphasis or to make comparisons¹³ and remain expository when performing this function:

他是兩年前結的婚。

tā shì liǎng nián qián jié de hūn

It was two years ago that he got married.

(emphasis)

¹³ See [Chapters 15](#) and [16](#) on 是 *shì* and 有 *yǒu* sentences.

妹妹是不喜欢喝啤酒。 (emphasis)

mèimei shì bù xǐhuan hē píjiǔ

It's true that younger sister doesn't like beer.

这件外套没有那件那么暖。 (comparison)

zhèi jiàn wàitào méiyǒu nài jiàn nàme nuǎn

This jacket isn't as warm as that one.

20.3.1.2 Adjectival predicates and complements

These constitute another form of comment. It must, however, be remembered that an unmodified adjective always implies a contrast.

谁不累? 大家都累。 shéi/shuí bù lèi | dàjiā dōu lèi

Who's not tired? Everybody's tired.

苹果贵, 香蕉也贵。 píngguǒ guì | xiāngjiāo yě guì

Apples are expensive and so are bananas.

昨天冷, 今天也冷。 zuótiān lěng | jīntiān yě lěng

It was cold yesterday and it's cold today as well.

她可长得漂亮。 tā kě zhǎng de piàoliang

But she is/has grown beautiful.

他比我讲得清楚。 tā bǐ wǒ jiǎng de qīngchu

He explains [it] more clearly than I.

20.3.2 Subject-predicate expository sentences

Both action and cognitive verbs are used in these sentences:

20.3.2.1 Statements of past action

Statements of past action indicated by presence of the verb suffix 过 *guo*:¹⁴

我吃过蜗牛。

wǒ chī guo wōniú

I have tried snails before

他听过中国歌曲。

tā tīng guo zhōngguó gēqǔ

He has heard Chinese songs.

¹⁴ See Chapter 6.

她说她见过鬼。

tā shuō tā jiàn guo guǐ

She said that she once saw a ghost.

我去过中国。

wǒ qù guo zhōngguó

I have been to China.

他们到过长城。

tāmen dào guo chángchéng

They have been to the Great Wall.

Narration,
description,
exposition
and evaluation

20.3.2.2 Potential complements

Potential complements¹⁵ as positive or negative statements of capability, possibility, likelihood, etc.:

他一辈子也学不会中文。**tā yībèizi yě xué bu huì zhōngwén**

(lit. he whole life also learn-cannot-master Chinese)

He will never in his life be able to learn/master Chinese.

这么贵的衣服我买不起。**zhème guì de yīfu wǒ mǎi bu qǐ**

(lit. such expensive **de** clothes I buy-cannot-afford)

I can't afford such expensive clothes.

这辆车坐得下五个人。**zhè liàng chē zuò de xià wǔ ge rén**

(lit. this mw car seat-can-hold five mw people)

This car can seat five people.

这个人一顿饭吃得下二十片面包。

zhèi ge rén yī dùn fàn chī de xià èrshí piàn miànbāo

(lit. this mw person one mw meal eat-can-down twenty slices bread)

This person can eat twenty slices of bread in one meal.

¹⁵ See [Chapter 10](#). Note the distinction made there between statements of capability by potential complements and by modal verbs. The latter as will be seen are elements in evaluative sentences.

20.3.2.3 Factual statements and habitual action

马吃草。

mǎ chī cǎo

Horses eat grass.

太阳从东方升起。

tàiyáng cóng dōngfāng shēngqǐ

The sun rises in the east.

我每天买报纸。

wǒ měitiān mǎi bàozhǐ

I buy a paper every day.

20.3.2.4 Cognition and preference

我知道他是中国人。	wǒ zhīdao tā shì zhōngguó rén I know he is Chinese.
我明白你的意思。	wǒ míngbái nǐ de yìsi I understand what you mean
他喜欢看外国电影。	tā xǐhuan kàn wàiguó diànyǐng He likes watching foreign films.
我爱花鸟。	wǒ ài huā niǎo I love flowers and birds.

20.3.2.5 Intentions and plans

我打算去旅行。	wǒ dāsuan qù lǚxíng I intend to go travelling.
我们买这个。	wǒmen mǎi zhèi ge We'll buy this one.
他的儿子明天来。	tāde érzi míngtiān lái His son is coming tomorrow.
我们去帮他的忙。	wǒmen qù bāng tāde máng We are going to help him

20.3.3 Negation of expository sentences

It is perhaps appropriate to point out here that all negative sentences with 不 **bù** (to negate habitual or intentional action) or 没有 **méi(yǒu)** (to negate noncompleted action with reference to a current situation)¹⁶ are expository. Their function is not to narrate or describe but to explain.

我不去。 **wǒ bù qù**
I won't go.

她不是我的女朋友。
tā bù shì wǒde nǚpéngyou
She is not my girlfriend.

大家都不理他。 **dàjiā dōu bù lǐ tā**
Everybody ignored him.

¹⁶ This use of 没有 **méi(yǒu)** must be distinguished from its use to negate past actions, which will then be narrative.

他还没(有)来。 **tā hái méi(yǒu) lái**
He still hasn't come.

她从来不吃大蒜。 **tā cónglái bù chī dàsuàn**
She never touches garlic.

她从来没(有)吃过大蒜。 **tā cónglái méi(yǒu) chī guo dàsuàn**
She has never touched garlic.

20.4 Evaluative sentences

Evaluative sentences are in fact expository, but they present a judgemental stance on the part of the speaker, so that they are not necessarily factual. They invariably have a topic–comment structure and the comment voices the opinion of the speaker. Like expository sentences, they never include an aspect marker at their core. They take two forms, one focusing on a modal verb, and the other on a modified adjective or complement.

20.4.1 The modal verb evaluative

Take the following example,

他应该马上开始工作。 **tā yīnggāi mǎshàng kāishǐ gōngzuò**
He must start work immediately.

It is obviously the speaker's view that the man referred to 'must start work immediately'. 他 **tā** 'he', in fact, is not the initiator of the action in the verb, but he is the topic on which the speaker is commenting in relation to the action, and is the focus of the speaker's concern and attention.

A major feature of an evaluative sentence is that, as with an expository topic–comment, the topic posed for comment can be of either definite or indefinite reference, can be any part of speech, and can be of any structural format. For example:

一个人不能不讲理。 **yī ge rén bùnéng bù jiǎnglǐ**
(lit. one mw person not can not talk reason)
A person has to listen to reason.

两个人能办很多事情。 **liǎng ge rén néng bàn hěnduō shìqíng**
(lit. two mw people can do many things)
Two hands can make light work.

办事情要有计划。 **bàn shìqíng yào yǒu jìhuà**
(lit. do things must have plan) One needs a plan to do things.

懒惰会毁坏他的一生。 **lǎnduò huì huǐhuài tāde yīshēng**
(lit. lazy possible ruin his one life)
Laziness is likely to ruin his whole life.

他不下场会影响球赛的胜负。
tā bù xià chǎng huì yǐngxiǎng qiú sài de shèngfù
(lit. he not come on to the pitch will affect match **de** victory-defeat)
His not taking part in the match will affect its outcome.

In the first and second examples, the noun topics are of indefinite reference; in the third, the topic takes the form of a verb; in the fourth, it is an adjective; in the last example, it is a clause.

20.4.2 The modified adjective/complement evaluative

The presence in the comment of a degree adverbial or complement registers the evaluative force of these sentences:

他办事情非常认真。 **tā bàn shìqíng fēicháng rènzhēn**
He runs/does things extremely seriously/conscientiously.

这儿的风景好极了。 **zhèr de fēngjǐng hǎo jí le**
The scenery here is really beautiful.

他跑得真快。 **tā pǎo de zhēn kuài**
He runs really fast.

这件事儿他处理得好得很。 **zhèi jiàn shìr tā chǔlǐ de hǎo de hěn**
(lit. this mw matter he handle **de** good **de** very much)
He handled this matter very well.

20.5 Comparisons between sentence types

The following pairs of similar sentences illustrate the distinctions that can be made between sentence types:

(a) 我们去了上海。 **wǒmen qù le shànghǎi** (narrative)
We went to Shanghai.

我们去过上海。 **wǒmen qù guo shànghǎi** (expository)
We've been to Shanghai.

The contrast here is plain: 了 *le* in the first sentence indicating the completion of an action implies a past event and is therefore narrative, whereas 过 *guo* in the second stating a past experience serves as an explanation and is therefore expository.

- (b) 他在墙上挂了一幅画儿。 (narrative)
Tā zài qiáng shàng guà le yī fú huàr
 He hung a picture on the wall.
- 墙上挂了一幅画儿。 (descriptive)
qiáng shàng guà le yī fú huàr
 On the wall hangs a picture.

The first sentence is clearly narrative completed action, while in the second the action verb with 了 *le* following the location phrase creates a resultant state and is therefore descriptive.

- (c) 爸爸在花园里看我给他买的报纸。¹⁷ (descriptive)
bàba zài huāyuán lǐ kàn wǒ gěi tā mǎi
de bàozhǐ
 Father is in the garden reading the
 newspaper I bought for him.
- 爸爸在花园里看了我给他买的报纸。 (narrative)
bàba zài huāyuán lǐ kàn le wǒ gěi tā mǎi
de bàozhǐ
 Father read the newspaper I bought for him in
 the garden.

¹⁷ It is possible to further insert the persistent-manner indicator 着 *zhe* in this sentence to enhance its descriptive effect: e.g. 爸爸在花园里看着我给他买的报纸。 **bàba zài huāyuán lǐ kàn zhe wǒ gěi tā mǎi de bàozhǐ** 'Father is in the garden reading the newspaper I bought for him'.

In the first sentence the location phrase 在花园里 *zài huāyuán lǐ* establishes the basis for the ongoing action of a descriptive sentence, but in the second it provides the setting for the completed action of a narrative sentence.

- (d) 我去找他。 **wǒ qù zhǎo tā** (expository)
 I'll go and look for him.
- 我去找了他。 **wǒ qù zhǎo le tā** (narrative)
 I went to look for him.

The first sentence expresses an intention and is therefore expository; the second with aspect marker 了 *le* is obviously a completed action narrative.

- (e) 筑路工人在路上挖了一个洞。 (narrative)
zhù lù gōngrén zài lù shàng wā le yī ge dòng
 The road workers dug a hole in the road.
- 筑路工人在路上挖洞。 (descriptive)
zhù lù gōngrén zài lù shàng wā dòng
 Road workers were digging a hole/holes in the road.

These sentences are obviously narrative and descriptive, but notice that in the first the subject has to be of definite reference, while in the second it can be either definite or indefinite depending on the context.

- (f) 他很快地跑着。 **tā hěn kuài de pǎo zhe** (descriptive)
 He is/was running very quickly.
- 他跑得很快。 **tā pǎo de hěn kuài** (expository)
 He runs very quickly.

The adverbial phrase 很快地 *hěn kuài de* in the first sentence describes the way in which he is running. The verb-complement in the second sentence 跑得很快 *pǎo de hěn kuài* explains the fact that he runs very fast.

- (g) 他昨天到了北京。 (narrative)
tā zuótiān dào le běijīng
 He arrived in Beijing yesterday.
- 他是昨天到的北京。 (expository)
tā shì zuótiān dào de běijīng
 He arrived in Beijing yesterday.

The first sentence narrates the fact that he arrived, but the emphatic 是 *shì* . . . 的 *de* construction in the second makes the sentence an explanation focusing on the time of his arrival and is therefore expository.

- (h) 我不能喝那么多的酒。 (evaluative)
wǒ bùnéng hē nàme duō de jiǔ
 I cannot drink so much wine.
- 我喝不了那么多的酒。 (expository)
wǒ hēbùliǎo nàme duō de jiǔ
 I cannot drink so much wine.

The use of the modal verb 能 *néng* in the first sentence means that the speaker is making a subjective judgement, perhaps on the level of principle

or diet. The second sentence with its potential complement 喝不了 *hēbuliǎo* is more objective and most likely indicates that he does not have the physical capacity to down any more liquor.

- (i) 他住在北京。 (expository)

tā zài běijīng zhù

He lives in Beijing.

他住在北京。

(descriptive)

tā zhù zài běijīng

He is living in Beijing.

The first sentence using an unmarked verb simply states the fact that he lives in Beijing and is therefore expository. The second with a 在 *zài* phrase as a complement clearly sets out to highlight a persistent state (i.e. he is living in Beijing) and is therefore descriptive.

- (j) 妈妈把房间收拾干净。 (narrative)

māma bǎ fángjiān shōushi gānjìng

Mother tidied up the room.

妈妈把房间收拾得真干净。

(evaluative)

māma bǎ fángjiān shōushi de zhēn gānjìng

Mother tidied up the room really well.

The first sentence is a narrative report. The focus in the second is on 真 *zhēn* ‘really’, which makes the statement evaluative, despite the presence of 把 *bǎ*.

20.6 Concluding remarks

The categorisation of sentences into sentence types attempts to provide a function-based framework to analyse the peculiarities of Chinese syntax. As we pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, it is difficult, not to say impossible, to establish any such watertight framework, and our analysis of Chinese sentence structure demonstrates that we have not lost sight of other approaches, including structural, semantic, stylistic and elemental, which of course are equally valid.

Imperatives, interrogatives and exclamations¹⁸ are used very much for their respective functions and there is little need therefore to subject them to the kind of minute differentiation discussed above. However, since they

¹⁸ See [Chapters 23](#) and [24](#).

are all based on corresponding statements, their characteristic features are derivable from their declarative counterparts.

There remains one further exceedingly important sentence type to be discussed. We have called this type *le*-expository, since it involves the addition of the particle 了 *le* at the end of the sentence and in function it provides a particular style of exposition. It can, in fact, be added to any of the four sentence types analysed above and its impact on them will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

了 *le*-expository sentences

了 *le*-expository sentences are formed by putting the particle 了 *le* at the end of virtually any statement. Like expository sentences they offer an explanation, but they add to this explanation the implication of some form of change or a reversal of a previous situation. They suggest that what is stated represents a change from what existed or what was happening before. In expressing him/herself in this way, the speaker is giving updated information, and (s)he will often back it with some degree of personal endorsement. Much of the time, the change asserted in 了 *le*-expository sentences is simply factual, but it also regularly counters an assumption or expectation in the mind of the person addressed. The context in which the statement is made is extremely important, and, as we will see, the implications of a particular sentence can vary significantly depending on the situation in which it is used. Not surprisingly, the construction is very much a feature of spoken language and the social interaction among Chinese people. It is therefore important to understand how it works, but its subtleties have been notoriously challenging for non-native speakers. We hope that the explanations and examples given below may throw some light on it.

This use of 了 *le* is of course separate from its role as an aspect marker. However, etymologically, the particle derives from the classical verb 了 *liǎo* ‘to end’, and a semantic link can clearly be seen between its two functions, one being the completion of an action, and the other the termination of a previous situation.

Consider the following two sentences:

她生了一个孩子。

tā shēng le yī ge hái zi

She had a baby.

她生了一个孩子了。

tā shēng le yī ge hái zi le

She's had a baby.

The first is a flat statement and the meaning implied by 了 *le* is that the action of 生 *shēng* ‘to give birth to’ has been completed. In other words, the action of giving birth to a child has already taken place. The sentence thus encodes a narrative. The second, on the other hand, is much more animated with almost certainly stress on the word ‘baby’, and the end-of-sentence 了 *le* conveys the sense that a new situation of ‘giving birth to a child’ has happened for someone who probably has not had a baby before. The speaker could of course have a range of different ideas in mind, depending on the circumstances, and the event could be happy, worrying, unexpected, thought to have been impossible, and so on, but the fundamental notion is that there has been a change. If the first example resembles a past tense in English, the second example is more like a present perfect. The aspect indicator 了 *le* in the former belongs to the realm of narration, while the end-of-sentence 了 *le* in the latter is a pointer to exposition.¹

In the following sections, we will focus, each at a time, on the various semantic and syntactic properties of end-of-sentence 了 *le*, where necessary in comparison with the aspect 了 *le*.

¹ See Chapter 20.

21.1 Change or reversal of a previous situation

Let us look at two more examples of change of circumstances, as described above. The first is a straightforward change:

我妹妹会说日文了。

wǒ mèimei huì shuō rìwén le

My younger sister can speak Japanese [now].

This implies that my sister did not know how to speak Japanese before but now she does, and this is something I think deserves some attention.

他看电影了。 **tā kàn diànyǐng le**

He has gone to the cinema [after all].

The suggestion here is that perhaps the person referred to used to be against cinema-going, or did not like going to the cinema at all, or something else. However, what used to be the case is not important. What is important for the speaker who cares to impart this piece of information is that the person referred to has now changed or reversed his former attitude: he is now doing what he would not do before.

Everyday situations also invite this kind of emphasis:

病人吃饭了。 **bìngrén chīfàn le**

This patient is eating. [(s)he has been unable to eat before]

天晴了。 **tiān qíng le**

The weather has cleared up. [it has been raining up till now]

时间不早了。 **shíjiān bù zǎo le**

Time's getting on. [lit. the time is not early any more]

All these examples describe an emerging situation that has turned the prior situation on its head.

Adjectives, being situation rather than action indicators, are regularly core elements in *le*-expository sentences indicating reversals. They may be used either independently as predicatives (as the first three examples below show) or as complements to verbs (as in the last three):

东西贵了。 **dōngxi guì le**

Things have become expensive/gone up.

他有点醉了。 **tā yǒudiǎn zuì le**

He's a bit drunk.

你的茶快凉了。 **nǐde chá kuài liáng le**

Your tea will soon be cold.

孩子的玩具摔坏了。 **háizi de wánjù shuāi huài le**

The children's toy has been/is broken.

我吃饱了。 **wǒ chī bǎo le**

I've eaten my fill./I am full.

这个字你写错了。 **zhèi ge zì nǐ xiě cuò le**

You have written this character wrongly.

Some expressions, which clearly signal new situations, past or future, are naturally linked with end-of-sentence 了 *le*: time adverbs like 已经 *yǐjīng* 'already', 快 *kuài* 'is about to', 要 *yào* 'will soon'; modal verbs, which indicate future possibilities, obligations or necessities; and all sentences with resultative complements signifying that something has 'already' been or will soon be accomplished or brought about:

(a) time adverbs:

我的病已经治好了。 **wǒde bìng yǐjīng zhì hǎo le**

My illness is already cured.

截止的日期快到了。

jiézhǐ de rìqī kuài dào le

The deadline is soon.

电影马上就要开演了。

diànyǐng mǎshàng jiù yào kāiyǎn le

The film is just about to start.

(b) modal verbs:

我该走了。**wǒ gāi zǒu le**

I must be off.

他不肯再捐款了。**tā bù kěn zài juānkuǎn le**

He's not willing to donate any more money.

你可以回去了。**nǐ kěyǐ huí qù le**

You may go back.

(c) resultative complements:

壶里的水煮开了。**hú li de shuǐ zhǔ kāi le**

(The water in) the pot has boiled.

来宾快到齐了。**lái bīn kuài dào qí le**

The guests are almost all here.

电灯安好了。**diàndēng ān hǎo le**

The electric light has been installed.

It is clear from all the above examples that, though 了 *le* is unstressed, the speaker who is using it is very much making a point. By tagging 了 *le* to the statement, (s)he wants to affirm the message and make the listener aware of its importance or relevance to the immediate situation. This immediate situation, while commonly located in the present, may also relate to events in the past or posed for the future:

去年九月底已经开始下雪了。

qùnián jiǔyuè dǐ yǐjīng kāishǐ xià xuě le

By the end of September last year it had already started snowing.

你明天九点钟才来的话，他可能已经离开这儿了。

**nǐ míngtiān jiǔ diǎn zhōng cái lái de huà | tā kěnéng yǐjīng
líkai zhèr le**

If you don't come tomorrow till 9 o'clock, he will probably already have left.

A hypothetical future can also be relevant:

我如果再有会考上大学，我一定不会象以前那样懒惰了。

wǒ rúguǒ zài yǒu jīhuì shàng dàxué | wǒ yīdìng bù huì xiàng yǐqián nàyang lǎnduò le

If I had the chance to go to university again, I certainly would not be as lazy as I was before.

This underlying attitude, the enthusiasm and willingness to put the listener in the picture, explains why native speakers make particular use of 了 *le* when they are trying to explain a situation or to sum it up.

21.2 Subjective endorsement behind the objective explanation

A speaker's response to a situation that is markedly better or worse than expected is regularly couched in a 了 *le*-expository form. (S)he is, in fact, voicing feelings about the impact of the new situation on him (or her) and (s)he expresses appreciation or displeasure, often vehemently. This explains why sentence 了 *le* is a common adjunct to hyperbole. Consider the following:

(我们)太幸运了。 (**wǒmen**) tài xìngyùn **le**

We are really lucky.

(这)真是再好不过了。 (**zhè**) zhēn shì zài hǎo bùguò **le**

You can't do better than this.

(这条裙子)漂亮极了。 (**zhèi tiáo qúnzi**) piàoliang jí **le**

This skirt is extremely pretty.

这个人坏透了。 **zhèi ge rén huài tòu le**

This man is thoroughly bad.

屋子里闷死了。 **wūzi li mēn sǐ le**

It's really stuffy in the room.

The structure holds good too for gentle imperatives or urgent requests where some form of immediate reversal of the existing situation is being urged or cautioned against:

好了，好了，别胡闹了。 **hǎo le | hǎo le | bié húnào le**

OK, OK, stop the racket.

走了，走了，时间不早了。 **zǒu le | zǒu le | shíjiān bù zǎo le**

Let's go, let's go, time's getting on.

不要哭了。 **bù yào kū le**

Stop crying.

大家都坐好了。 **dàjiā dōu zuò hǎo le**

Would everyone sit down.

请别谈话了，会议开始了。 **qǐng bié tánhuà le | huìyì kāishǐ le**

Please stop talking. The meeting is starting.

快浇点儿水，别让花儿蔫了。

kuài jiāo diǎnr shuǐ | bié ràng huār niān le

Hurry up and water them and don't let the flowers droop.

多穿点儿衣服，别着凉了。

duō chuān diǎnr yīfu | bié zháoliáng le

Put a bit more on and don't catch cold.

A similarly committed response can also be expected from the listener when a speaker asks questions demanding immediate indication as to whether a reversal of the existing situation can be expected or brought about:

情况究竟怎么样了？

qíngkuàng jiūjìng zěnmeyàng le

What's the situation really like?

这么晚了。他到底来不来了？

zhème wǎn le | tā dàodǐ lái bù lái le

It's so late. Is he really coming or not?

Sometimes the speaker may even explicitly indicate that the new situation is counter to his/her expectation:

我以为他回家去了。 **wǒ yǐwéi tā huí jiā qù le**

I thought he had gone home.

想不到在这儿见到你了。 **xiǎngbudào zài zhèr jiàn dào nǐ le**

[I] didn't realise that I would bump into you here.

It is often the case that it is the impact of change or reversal as much as the change itself that is in the mind of the speaker:

我们看过那个电影了。 **wǒmen kàn guo nèi ge diànyǐng le**

We have seen that film. [we don't want to see it again]

儿子偷了父亲的钱了。 **érzi tōu le fùqīn de qián le**

The son stole his father's money. [that is unthinkable]

21.3 Summing up after a series of actions

A narrative account in Chinese usually consists of the description of a sequence of actions or events, marked as appropriate by the aspect marker 了 *le*, which is terminated by some form of summing up ending with sentence 了 *le*. This last summing up naturally presents a picture of the new circumstances at the end of the preceding sequence:

他洗了脸，刷了牙，脱了衣服，上床睡觉去了。

tā xǐ le liǎn | shuā le yá | tuō le yīfu | shàngchuáng shuìjiào qù le

He washed his face, brushed his teeth, undressed and went to bed.

爸爸吃了早饭，翻了翻报纸，披上衣服，就开车去上班了。

bàba chī le zǎofàn | fān le fān bàozhǐ | pī shàng yīfu | jiù

kāichē qù shàngbān le

Father had breakfast, looked through the paper, put on his coat and drove off to work.

There are cases where there is a need to stress new circumstances at every step and these naturally invite end-of-sentence/clause 了 *le*:

天黑了，路上的行人越来越少了，商店也一家接一家地关门了，

她觉得饿了，可是钱花完了，走着走着，她哭起来了。

tiān hēi le | lù shàng de xíng rén yuè lái yuè shǎo le |

shāngdiàn yě yī jiā jiē yī jiā de guānmén le | tā juéde è le |

kěshì qián huā wán le | zǒu zhe zǒu zhe | tā kū qǐlai le

It went dark, people on the street grew fewer and fewer, (and) the shops closed one after another. She felt hungry, but she had spent all her money. She walked and walked, and began to cry.

This sense of summing up a situation or bringing a particular topic to a close before going on to a new one by the use of end-of-sentence/clause 了 *le* may also be found with nominal comments. Compare the following pairs of sentences:

孩子今年五岁。 **háizi jīnnián wǔ suì**

孩子今年五岁了。 **háizi jīnnián wǔ suì le**

The child is 5 years old.

今天星期六。 **jīntiān xīngqī liù**

今天星期六了。 **jīntiān xīngqī liù le**

It's Saturday today.

The first example of each pair expresses only a fact: 'the child is 5 years old' or 'today is Saturday'. The addition of end-of-sentence 了 *le* conveys

the sense of eventually reaching the present situation or position: the child is (now) 5, and today is (finally) Saturday.

21.4 A rhythmic necessity for monosyllabic verbs or verbalised adjectives

Syntactic constructions in Chinese are not only governed by structural and lexical validity but are also shaped by rhythmic patterns. This applies to end-of-sentence 了 *le* (as well as aspect 了 *le*), which may sometimes be optional with disyllabic verbs or adjectives but is obligatory with monosyllabic verbs or verbalised adjectives. Compare the following sets of sentences:

- (a) 客人早已离开了。 **kèrén zǎo yǐ líkāi le**
客人早已离开。 **kèrén zǎo yǐ líkāi**

客人早已走了。 **kèrén zǎo yǐ zǒu le**
*客人早已走。 ***kèrén zǎo yǐ zǒu**
The guests have long since left.
- (b) 事情已经办妥了。 **shìqíng yǐjīng bàn tuǒ le**
事情已经办妥。 **shìqíng yǐjīng bàn tuǒ**

事情已经办了。 **shìqíng yǐjīng bàn le**
*事情已经办。 ***shìqíng yǐjīng bàn**
The matter has already been settled.
- (c) 他的病即将痊愈了。 **tāde bìng jíjiāng quányù le**
他的病即将痊愈。 **tāde bìng jíjiāng quányù**

他的病快要²好了。 **tāde bìng kuàiyào hǎo le**
*他的病快要好。 ***tāde bìng kuàiyào hǎo**
He will soon recover from his illness.

² The difference between 即将 *jíjiāng* ‘soon’ and 快要 *kuàiyào* ‘soon’ is one of register and style. It does not affect structural validity of the sentence.

It can be seen from the three sets of sentences that the last one in each case is unacceptable, because a monosyllabic verb or verbalised adjective coming at the end of a sentence can be regarded as valid only if it is accompanied by an extra syllable for rhythm. 了 *le* here fulfils this function ideally, as it also serves as an end-of-sentence marker.³

³ Resultative complements like 妥 *tuǒ* ‘settled’ often act as rhythmic fillers, as does the descriptive indicator 着 *zhe*, e.g. *他在树荫下躺 versus 他在树荫下躺着 *tā zài shù yīn xià tǎng zhe* ‘He is lying in the shade of the tree’.

In many cases, this end-of-sentence 了 *le* serves as a rhythmic filler as well as an indicator of the reversal of circumstances. Common examples are:

天晴了。	tiān qíng le It has cleared up.
天黑了。	tiān hēi le It's gone dark.
天亮了。	tiān liàng le It's light now.
雨停了。	yǔ tíng le It's stopped raining.
你胖了。 ⁴	nǐ pàng le You've put on weight.
我的孩子都大了。	wǒde háizi dōu dà le My children are all grown up.
我们赢了。	wǒmen yíng le We won.
谁输了?	shuí shū le Who lost?

⁴ This is under most circumstances a compliment rather than a critical comment.

21.5 Two or three functions in one

As was said earlier in the chapter, end-of-sentence 了 *le* is isomorphic with aspectual 了 *le*, with both of them deriving from 了 *liǎo* 'to end'. This being the case, an end-of-sentence 了 *le* following a verb may often represent the completion of the action indicated by the verb as well as the emergence of a new situation. This two-in-one role is apparent in most of the examples at the end of §21.4.

In some cases, even the meaning of the isomorphic 了 *liǎo* 'to end' may be implied in an end-of-sentence 了 *le*, thus giving it a three-in-one function. For example:

请把剩下的酒喝了! **qǐng bǎ shèngxia de jiǔ hē le**
Please finish off the remaining wine.

垃圾我已经倒了。 **lājī wǒ yǐjīng dào le**
I have already tipped out the rubbish.

她把不要的衣服全扔了。 **tā bǎ bù yào de yīfú quán rēng le**
She threw out all the clothes she did not want.

This three-in-one function is confirmed if we rewrite the above three sentences, incorporating the resultative complement 掉 *diào* ‘to be finished’ (which is itself co-morphogenic with 了 *liǎo* ‘to finish’). In each case the meaning remains the same:

请把剩下的酒喝掉了！

qǐng bǎ shèngxia de jiǔ hē diào le

Please finish off the remaining wine.

垃圾我已经倒掉了。

lāji wǒ yǐjīng dào diào le

I have already tipped out the rubbish.

她把不要的衣服全扔掉了。

tā bǎ bù yào de yīfu quán rēng diào le

She threw out all the clothes she did not want.

21.6 *le*-expository sentences and the four basic sentence types

We said at the beginning of this chapter that 了 *le* could be added to any sentence to form a *le*-expository sentence. To sum up our discussion of *le*-expository sentences, we will here illustrate in a sequence of paired examples the impact that end-of-sentence 了 *le* has on the other sentence types. We will start off with expository sentences:

21.6.1 *Expository sentences*

我哥哥是工程师。 **wǒ gēge shì gōngchéngshī** (expository)

My elder brother is an engineer.

我哥哥是工程师了。 **wǒ gēge shì gōngchéngshī le** (*le*-expository)

My elder brother is now an engineer. [he wasn't before]

她有孩子。 **tā yǒu hái zi** (expository)

She has got children.

她有孩子了。 **tā yǒu hái zi le** (*le*-expository)

She has a child/children now. [she didn't before]

妈妈吃素。 **māma chī sù** (expository)

(lit. mother eat vegetarian food)

Mother is a vegetarian.

妈妈吃素了。 māma chī sù le (lit. mother eat vegetarian food) Mother has become a vegetarian. [she wasn't one before]	(<i>le</i> -expository)
她拉小提琴。 tā lā xiǎotíqín She plays the violin.	(expository)
她拉小提琴了。 tā lā xiǎotíqín le She plays the violin now. [she did not use to]	(<i>le</i> -expository)
这个人不怕鬼。 zhèi ge rén bù pà guǐ (lit. this mw person not afraid-of ghosts) This person is not afraid of ghosts.	(expository)
这个人不怕鬼了。 zhèi ge rén bù pà guǐ le (lit. this mw person not afraid-of ghosts <i>le</i>) This person is no longer afraid of ghosts. [he was before]	(<i>le</i> -expository)

21.6.2 Narrative sentences

他在钢琴上弹了两个曲子。 tā zài gāngqín shàng tán le liǎng ge qǔzi He played two pieces of music on the piano.	(narrative)
他在钢琴上弹了两个曲子了。 tā zài gāngqín shàng tán le liǎng ge qǔzi le He has [already] played two pieces of music on the piano. [that's enough; someone else can play, etc.]	(<i>le</i> -expository)
他当了父亲。 tā dāng le fùqin He became a father.	(narrative)
他当了父亲了。 tā dāng le fùqin le He is now a father. [he wasn't one before and now he has a child]	(<i>le</i> -expository)
我学了三年英文。 wǒ xué le sān nián yīngwén I studied English for three years.	(narrative)
我学了三年英文了。 wǒ xué le sān nián yīngwén le I have studied English for three years. [this is the point I have reached in the learning process]	(<i>le</i> -expository)

他喝了十杯啤酒。 (narrative)

tā hē le shí bēi píjiǔ

He drank ten glasses of beer.

他喝了十杯啤酒了。 (le-expository)

tā hē le shí bēi píjiǔ le

He's drunk ten glasses of beer.

[he should not have any more; that is why he can't stand up, etc.]

我在这儿等了半个钟头。 (narrative)

wǒ zài zhèr děng le bàn ge zhōngtōu

I waited here for half an hour.

我在这儿等了半个钟头了。 (le-expository)

wǒ zài zhèr děng le bàn ge zhōngtōu le

I have been waiting here for half an hour. [I won't wait any longer]

21.6.3 Descriptive sentences

外面下着大雪。 (descriptive)

wàimian xià zhe dà xuě

(lit. outside fall **zhe** big snow) It is snowing heavily outside.

外面下着大雪了。 (le-expository)

wàimian xià zhe dà xuě le

(lit. outside fall **zhe** big snow **le**)

It is now snowing heavily outside. [it wasn't a moment ago]

她在生气。 (descriptive)

tā zài shēngqì

She is sulking.

她在生气了。 (le-expository)

tā zài shēngqì le

She is now sulking. [that wasn't the case before]

他在准备他的功课。 (descriptive)

tā zài zhǔnbèi tāde gōngkè

He is preparing/doing his homework.

他在准备他的功课了。 (le-expository)

tā zài zhǔnbèi tāde gōngkè le

He is preparing/doing his homework. [this is something he ought to do]

车子在外面等着。

(descriptive)

chēzi zài wàimian děng zhe

The car is waiting outside.

车子在外面等着了。

(*le*-expository)

chēzi zài wàimian děng zhe le

The car is now waiting outside.

[it's just arrived and I think you ought to go]

21.6.4 Evaluative sentences

你应该感谢他。

(evaluative)

nǐ yīnggāi gǎnxiè tā

You should thank him.

你应该感谢他了。

(*le*-expository)

nǐ yīnggāi gǎnxiè tā le

You should now thank him.

[it might not have been necessary to do so before]

我能去。

(evaluative)

wǒ néng qù

I can go.

我能去了。

(*le*-expository)

wǒ néng qù le

I can go now. [I couldn't before]

我今天必须画完这幅画儿。

(evaluative)

wǒ jīntiān bìxū huà wán zhèi fú huàr

I must finish this painting today.

我今天必须画完这幅画儿了。

(*le*-expository)

wǒ jīntiān bìxū huà wán zhèi fú huàr le

Now I must finish this painting today. [I should have finished it already]

这朵花儿很香。

(evaluative)

zhèi duǒ huār hěn xiāng

This flower has a beautiful scent.

这朵花儿很香了。

(*le*-expository)

zhèi duǒ huār hěn xiāng le

This flower (now) has a beautiful scent.

[it didn't before; I did not expect it to be so fragrant]

Though 了 *le* can be added to any sentence to make it *le*-expository, there are cases where the result would require exceptional circumstances. However, no matter how infrequent or strange a situation might be on the face of it, a possible reading can always be found. For example:

他们在谈天了。 **tāmen zài tán tiān le**

(lit. they **zài** chat **le**)

They are chatting now. [it was not the case a moment ago]

The implication can of course be retrieved only from the context: e.g. they were working very hard and had not had the time to sit down for a chat before, or they had quarrelled and now seem to be getting on better.

Stranger still might be an example like the following:

他在等人了。 **tā zài děng rén le**

He is now waiting for somebody. [it was not the case a while ago]

Possible interpretations of this might be that he had been busy doing something else and had forgotten he should be waiting for somebody or that it is usually the case that somebody else is waiting for *him* and now the situation is reversed, and so on.

Whatever the prior situation may be, it is only retrievable from the context. The prime syntactic function of 了 *le* in all *le*-expository sentences is to indicate a reversal: a declaration that what is the case now is not what it was before.

Chapter 22

Conjunctions and conjunctives

Conjunctions in Chinese may be divided into two major types: those coupling words or phrases and those linking clauses. Conjunctives, on the other hand, are a set of monosyllabic referential adverbs, which generally are found at the beginning or towards the beginning of the second (or main) clause of a sentence. They refer back to the preceding (or subordinate) clause, which may itself include a conjunction or, in a limited number of cases, another conjunctive.

Clauses in a sentence can also be brought together without any form of connective marker (conjunction or conjunctive). This happens when correlative or parallel constructions are employed, or where two clauses are set in apposition, where the meaning of the second clause is in some way consequential on that of the first.

In the following sections, we will discuss conjunctions which join words and phrases, conjunctions and conjunctives that link clauses, correlatives that introduce parallel structures, and clauses set in apposition to each other.

22.1 Conjunctions that link words or phrases

22.1.1 *The four conjunctions*

There are four conjunctions that join nouns or nominal expressions. These conjunctions, which all mean ‘and’, may often be used interchangeably, the difference between them being one of style:

和 hé	[neutral]
跟 gēn	[northern colloquial]
同 tóng	[southern colloquial]
与 yǔ	[formal]

For example:

爸爸和妈妈都出去了。 **bàba hé māma dōu chūqù le**
Mother and father have both gone out.

城市跟农村我都住过。 **chéngshì gēn nóngcūn wǒ dōu zhùguo**
I have lived in towns and villages.

你同我都是南方人。 **nǐ tóng wǒ dōu shì nánfāng rén**
You and I are both Southerners.

白天与黑夜他都在工作。 **báitiān yǔ hēiyè tā dōu zài gōngzuò**
He works day and night.

If there are more than two nominal items, the conjunction comes between the last two, the rest being separated by *dun*-commas /、/, which are enumerative commas. These *dun*-commas are unique to Chinese and are written in the reverse direction of a standard comma /, /:

哥哥、姐姐、妹妹和弟弟 **gēge | jiějie | mèimei hé dìdi**
Elder brother, elder sister, younger sister and younger brother.

物理、化学、数学和哲学 **wùlǐ | huàxué | shùxué hé zhéxué**
Physics, chemistry, maths and philosophy.

22.1.2 而 *ér* ‘also’

This is often used to join two adjectives or adjectival expressions, which are either both affirmative or an affirmative followed by a negative. In the former case, the two adjectives must be of similar length, either both monosyllabic or both disyllabic. In the latter case, the affirmative adjective is always monosyllabic and the negative disyllabic with 不 *bù* ‘not’ as the first syllable, in a rhythmic, antithetical sequence:

这个人坚定而勇敢。 **zhèi ge rén jiāndìng ér yǒnggǎn**
This man is steadfast and brave.

他是个认真而严谨的科学家。
tā shì ge rènzhēn ér yánjǐn de kēxuéjiā
He is a serious and rigorous scientist.

这篇文章长而空。 **zhèi piān wénzhāng cháng ér kōng**
This essay is long and vacuous/devoid of content.

长而不空 **cháng ér bù kōng** long but not vacuous

艳而不俗 **yàn ér bù sú** gaudy but not vulgar

这个西瓜大而不甜。 **zhèi ge xīguā dà ér bù tián**
This watermelon is large but not sweet.

22.1.3 并 **bìng** ‘also’

This can link two predicate verbs that are transitive and share the same object:

会上讨论并通过了这项提案。

huì shàng tāolùn bìng tōngguòle zhèi xiàng tí'àn

The meeting discussed and passed this motion.

大家都同意并拥护我的提议。

dàjiā dōu tóngyì bìng yōnghù wǒde tíyì

Everyone agreed with and supported my proposal.

The lexical conjunctions cited above are the standard connectives for the three word categories of nouns, adjectives and verbs. However, as we shall see from the clausal conjunctions below, they have disyllabic variants: e.g. 以及 **yǐjǐ** ‘also’ for 和 **hé**, etc., 而且 **érqiě** ‘but also’ for 而 **ér**, and 并且 **bìngqiě** ‘and also’ for 并 **bìng**.

22.2 Clausal conjunctions and conjunctives

Clausal conjunctions in Chinese form a large closed set. They display the following distinctive features:

- (a) some have monosyllabic and disyllabic variants depending on rhythmic requirements:

但是 **dànshì** ‘but’ > 但 **dàn** ‘but’

虽然 **suīrán** ‘though’ > 虽 **suī** ‘though’

如果 **rúguǒ** ‘if’ > 如 **rú** ‘if’

- (b) some occur in pairs, others individually or in pairs, and others with conjunctives:

不但 **bùdàn** ‘not only’ ... 而且 **érqiě** ‘but also’ (a pair)

不过 **bùguò** ‘but’ (individual)

(因为 **yīnwèi** ‘because’) ... 所以 **suǒyǐ** ‘therefore’ (individual/a pair)

只有 **zhǐyǒu** ‘only’ ... 才 **cái** ‘then’ (with conjunctive)

- (c) they may be positioned either before the subject/topic or before the predicate/comment depending on the scope of meaning they govern in the sentence:

他不但会说英文，而且会说中文。

tā bùdàn huì shuō yīngwén | érqiě huì shuō zhōngwén

He cannot only speak English, but he can speak Chinese too.

不但大人会说中文，而且连小孩也会说中文。

bùdàn dàrén huì shuō zhōngwén | érqiě lián xiǎohái yě huì shuō zhōngwén

Not only can the adults speak Chinese, but even the children can too.

Clausal conjunctives are monosyllabic referential adverbs. They are limited in number, with the most common being: 就 **jiù** ‘then’, 才 **cái** ‘only then’, 都 **dōu** ‘both or all’, 也 **yě** ‘also’ (or its classical counterpart 亦 **yì** ‘also’), 还 **hái** ‘as well’, 却 **què** ‘but’, etc. They are used mainly in the second clause of a sentence¹:

- (a) to echo a conjunction in the first clause:

今天虽然出太阳，气温却很低。

jīntiān suīrán chū tàiyáng | qìwēn què hěn dī

Although the sun is out today, the temperature is (however) very low.

他如果喝醉了，我们就送他回家。

tā rúguǒ hē zuì le | wǒmen jiù sòng tā huíjiā

If he is drunk, we will (then) take him home.

- (b) to enhance the second of a pair of conjunctions:

要是你不舒服，那(么)就别来了。

yàoshi nǐ bù shūfu | nà(me) jiù bié lái le

If you aren’t well, in that case don’t come (then).

他不但骂人，而且还打人呢。

tā bùdàn mà rén | érqiě hái dǎ rén ne

He not only swears at people, but also (in addition) hits them.

¹ See [Chapter 9](#) on adverbials for a full list of these monosyllabic referential adverbs.

22.3 Clausal conjunctions and conjunctives in semantic categories

In each subset, the meaning is more or less similar, but in style they can range from the formal to the colloquial.

22.3.1 Giving reasons: *because, because of, therefore*

- (a) 因为 *yīnwèi* ‘because’ ... 所以 *suǒyǐ* ‘therefore’ paired conjunctions in pre-subject/topic positions:

因为天气不好，所以比赛暂停。

yīnwèi tiānqì bù hǎo | suǒyǐ bǐsài zàntíng

Because the weather was bad, the match was (therefore) suspended.

- (b) 因为 *yīnwèi*/因 *yīn* ‘because’, on its own as a first-clause conjunction with flexible positioning:²

因为有些事情没办完，我在广州多停留了四天。

yīnwèi yǒuxiē shìqìng méi bàn wán | wǒ zài guǎngzhōu duō tíngliú le sì tiān

Because there was some unfinished business, I stayed on for four days in Guangzhou.

因年代久远，这件事已无法考查。

yīn niándài jiǔyuǎn | zhèi jiàn shì yǐ wúfǎ kǎochá

Because it was in the remote past, there is no way to check this matter.

我刚到广州的时候，因为不懂广州话，闹了不少笑话。

wǒ gāng dào guǎngzhōu de shíhou | yīnwèi bù dǒng guǎngzhōu huà | nào le bùshǎo xiàohuà

When I first arrived in Guangzhou, because I did not understand Cantonese, I made a lot of funny mistakes.

² What is meant by ‘flexible positioning’ is that it may be used either in a pre-subject/topic position or in a pre-predicate/comment position, depending on the context.

- (c) 由于 *yóuyóu* ‘because’, first-clause conjunction in a pre-subject/topic position:

由于腿部受伤，他没参加比赛。

yóuyóu tuǐ bù shòushāng | tā méi cānjiā bǐsài

Because he had a leg injury, he did not play in the match.

- (d) 因而 *yīn’ér* or 因此 *yīncǐ* ‘therefore’, second-clause conjunctions in a pre-subject/topic position:

天气不好，因而比赛暂停。

tiānqì bù hǎo | yīn’ér bǐsài zàntíng

The weather was bad, so the match was suspended.

他腿部受了伤，因此没参加比赛。

tā tuǐ bù shòu le shāng | yīncǐ méi cānjiā bǐsài

He had a leg injury, so he did not play in the match.

她非常和气，因而大家都喜欢她。

tā fēicháng héqì | yīn'ér dàjiā dōu xǐhuan tā

She was extremely kind, therefore everyone liked her.

他们来得很晚，因此没有饭吃。

tāmen lái de hěn wǎn | yīncǐ méiyǒu fàn chī

They came very late, and so there was nothing to eat.

(e) 所以 suǒyǐ ‘therefore’, second-clause conjunction, with flexible positioning:

这条路我常走，所以很熟。

zhèi tiáo lù wǒ cháng zǒu | suǒyǐ hěn shú

I often go this way, and so (I) know it well.

我知道你口重，所以多放了点儿盐。

wǒ zhīdao nǐ kǒuzhòng | suǒyǐ duō fàng le diǎnr yán

I know you are fond of salty food, and therefore I have added a bit more salt.

22.3.2 Making inferences: since

既然 jìrán ‘since’ ... (那么 nàme) 就 jiù ‘then’, ‘conjunction + (conjunction) conjunctive’ pair. (The first-clause conjunction is flexible in positioning, but the second-clause conjunctive may be used only pre-verbally. 那么 nàme ‘then’ as the second conjunction is often omitted or abbreviated to 那 nà):

他既然认错了，你就原谅他吧。

tā jìrán rèncuò le | nǐ jiù yuánliàng tā ba

Since he’s admitted his mistake, you (then) forgive him.

既然两(个)人的看法不一样，这项合作就只好作罢了。

jìrán liǎng (ge) rén de kànfǎ bù yīyàng | zhèi xiàng hézuò jiù zhǐhǎo zuòbà le

Since the two of them have different views, cooperation on this must (then) be abandoned.

既然她不理你，那么你就别理她吧。

jìrán tā bù lǐ nǐ | nàme nǐ jiù bié lǐ tā ba

Since she is ignoring you, (in that case) don’t you (then) take any notice of her.

既然她不愿意，那就算了。 jìrán tā bù yuànyì | nà jiù suàn le
Since she is unwilling, (in that case) (then) forget about it.

22.3.3 Expressing supposition: if

- (a) 如(果) rú(guǒ)/要(是) yào(shì) (colloquial) . . . (那么 nàme) 就 jiù ‘then’, a ‘conjunction + (conjunction) conjunctive’ pair, with the second conjunction optional. (The position of the first-clause conjunction is flexible, while the second-clause conjunctive is always pre-verbal):

翻译如果不顾本国语的特点，就会使人看不懂。

fānyì rúguǒ bù gù běnguóyǔ de tèdiǎn | jiù huì shǐ rén kàn bù dǒng

(lit. translation if not consider native language **de** characteristics | then may cause people read not understand)

If translation ignores the characteristics of the original language, (then) people may not understand.

如果你认为这样办比较好，那么咱们就这么办吧。

rúguǒ nǐ rènwéi zhèyàng bàn bǐjiào hǎo | nàme zánmen jiù zhème bàn ba

If you think doing it this way is better, in that case/then let's do it this way.

我今晚没空，你要是想去，那就请便吧。

wǒ jīnwǎn méi kòng | nǐ yàoshì xiǎng qù | nà jiù qǐngbiàn ba

I am busy this evening, and if you want to go, then please yourself/go ahead.

要把这篇文章写好，就得多参考一些有关的资料。

yào bǎ zhèi piān wénzhāng xiě hǎo | jiù děi duō cānkǎo yīxiē yǒuguān de zīliào

If you want to write this essay well, then (you) will have to do a bit more consulting of relevant materials/data.

- (b) 如(果) rú(guǒ)/要(是) yào(shì) (colloquial), individual first-clause conjunction, with flexible positioning:

如果你一时手头不便，我可以先给你垫上。

rúguǒ nǐ yīshí shǒutóu bùbiàn | wǒ kěyǐ xiān gěi nǐ diàn shàng

If you are short of money for the moment, I can lend you some (to pay for it first).

你如有困难，我可以帮助你。

nǐ rú yǒu kùnnan | wǒ kěyǐ bāngzhù nǐ

If you have a problem, I can help you.

你要是见到他，请你把这封信交给他。

nǐ yàoshi jiàn dào tā | qǐng nǐ bǎ zhèi fēng xìn jiāo gěi tā

If you see him, please give him this letter.

要是我忘了，请你提醒我。

yàoshi wǒ wàng le | qǐng nǐ tíxǐng wǒ

If I forget, please remind me.

The first-clause conjunction 如果 rúguǒ ‘if’ is generally replaceable by the following:

假如 **jiǎrú** ‘supposing’ (or its variants 假若 **jiǎruò**, 假使 **jiǎshǐ**)

假如明天不下雨，我一定去。

jiǎrú míngtiān bù xià yǔ | wǒ yīdìng qù

If it doesn’t rain tomorrow, I’ll definitely go.

倘若 **tǎngruò** ‘in case’

他倘若不信，就让他亲自去看看。

tā tǎngruò bù xìn | jiù ràng tā qīnzì qù kànkàn

In case he does not believe (it), (then) let him see for himself.

若是 **ruòshì** ‘if’

我若是³你，我就绝不会答应他。

wǒ ruòshì nǐ | wǒ jiù jué bùhuì dāying tā

If I were you, (then) I certainly would not comply with his request.

万一 **wànyī** ‘in the event of’

万一出问题，咱们怎么办？**wànyī chū wèntí | zánmen zénme bàn**

In the event of a problem arising, what are we to do?

³ Note that a conjunction like 若是 **ruòshì**, which has 是 **shì** as a constituent element, does not need to be followed by the verb 是 **shì** ‘to be’ in a sentence like this.

A more rhetorical supposition that must be negative in meaning is encoded by (要)不是 (**yào**)**bùshì** or 若非 **ruǒfēi** ‘if (it were) not (the case) that’, or 莫非 **mòfēi** ‘unless’:

(要)不是你提醒我，我差点儿把这件事忘了。

(yào)bùshì nǐ tíxǐng wǒ | wǒ chā diǎnr bǎ zhèi jiàn shì wàng le

If you had not reminded me, I could well have forgotten it/could have come close to forgetting.

若非意见分歧，合同早就签订了。

ruòfēi yìjiàn fēnqí | hétóng zǎo jiù qiāndìng le

If there were not a difference of opinion, (then) the agreement would have long since been signed.

她原先答应来的，可是现在还没来，莫非她病了 (不成)。⁴

tā yuánxiān dāying lái de | kěshì xiànzài hái méi lái | mòfēi tā bìng le (bùchéng)

She originally agreed to come, but she still hasn't arrived, and so could she be ill.

⁴ Note that 莫非 mòfēi can colloquially have a shift of meaning to 'could (it) be (the case) that' or 'it must be (the case) that', and that, when used in this way, it is often paired with 不成 bùchéng 'it will not do' at the end of the sentence.

22.3.4 Stating conditions: only if, only when

- (a) 只要 zhǐyào 'only if, provided', a first-clause conjunction, with flexible positioning, which may or may not be linked with a conjunctive:

只要你努力，你一定能取得优良的成绩。

zhǐyào nǐ nǔlì | nǐ yīdìng néng qǔdé yōuliáng de chéngjì

Only if you put in an effort will you be sure of achieving a good result.

书旧点儿没关系，只要不缺页就行。⁵

shū jiù diǎnr méi guānxi | zhǐyào bù quē yè jiù xíng

It doesn't matter if the book is a bit old, provided no pages are missing (then it will be all right).

只要认真学，什么都能学会。

zhǐyào rènzhēn xué | shénme dōu néng xuéhuì

(You) can master anything, provided you study seriously.

只要肯动脑筋，中文的语法一点儿也不难。

zhǐyào kěn dòng nǎojīn | zhōngwén de yǔfǎ yīdiǎnr yě bù nán

Chinese grammar is not difficult at all, provided you put your mind to it/use your brains.

⁵ The second clause here in fact consists of two clauses: the first clause being 只要不缺页, and the second 就行.

- (b) 只有 zhǐyǒu ‘only when, only if’ ... 才 cái ‘only then’, a conjunction + conjunctive pair, the first-clause conjunction being flexible in positioning while the second-clause conjunctive may only be pre-verbal:

只有乐观，你的病才能恢复得快。

zhǐyǒu lèguān | nǐde bìng cái néng huīfù de kuài

Only by being optimistic could you (then) be able to have a speedy recovery (from your illness).

只有保持冷静，你才能赢得最后的胜利。

zhǐyǒu bǎochí lěngjìng | nǐ cái néng yíng de zuìhòu de shènglì

Only by keeping calm will you (then) be able to win the final victory.

- (c) 除非 chúfēi ‘unless’ ... 不然 bùrán/否则 fǒuzé ‘or, otherwise’ ... a conjunction + conjunction pair, with pre-subject positioning:

除非你保持冷静，不然你得不到最后的胜利。

chúfēi nǐ bǎochí lěngjìng | bùrán nǐ débudào zuìhòu de shènglì

Unless you keep calm (otherwise) you won’t be able to win the final victory.

除非天气不好，否则我们下午去看他们。

chúfēi tiānqì bù hǎo | fǒuzé wǒmen xiàwǔ qù kàn tāmen

Unless the weather is bad, (otherwise) we will go to see them this afternoon.

22.3.5 Offering concessions: *though, although, yet*

虽然 suīrán or 虽 suī ‘although’, depending on required rhythm, as first-clause conjunction, with flexible positioning, followed by a second-clause conjunction like 但(是) dàn(shì) or 可(是) kě(shì) ‘yet’ or a conjunctive such as 却 què ‘yet’, 倒 dào ‘nevertheless’ or 可 kě ‘despite all’:

他虽然身体不好，但是很少请假。

tā suīrán shēntǐ bù hǎo | dànshì hěn shǎo qǐngjià

Although he wasn’t well/strong, (yet) he rarely requested leave.

大家虽然很累，可是心情都很愉快。

dàjiā suīrán hěn lèi | kěshì xīnqíng dōu hěn yúkuài

Although everyone was tired, (yet) their mood was cheerful.

文章虽短，却很有力。

wénzhāng suī duǎn | què hěn yǒulì

Although the essay is short, (yet) it is very forceful.

商店虽然很小，货物倒很齐全。

shāngdiàn suīrán hěn xiǎo | huòwù dào hěn qíquán
Although the shop is small, (nevertheless) it is well-stocked.

这孩子年龄虽然不大，说话可十分老练。

zhèi háizi niánlíng suīrán bù dà | shuōhuà kě shífēn lǎoliàn
Although this child isn't old, (yet) (s)he speaks with a voice of experience.

虽然冬天已经到了，可是玫瑰花仍然开着。

suīrán dōngtiān yǐjīng dào le | kěshì méiguīhuā réngrán kāi zhe
Although winter has already arrived, (yet) the roses are still blooming.

The concession, as we can see from the above examples, is usually featured in the first clause and is often negative in nature. If the concession is more positive, i.e. making allowances instead of offering concessions, the conjunctive in the second clause will be 还(是) **hái(shì)** or 仍(然) **réng(rán)** 'still' or 也 **yě** 'nevertheless' to provide a (negative) contrast:

他的病虽然好了，身体还(是)很虚弱。

tāde bìng suīrán hǎo le | shēntǐ hái(shì) hěn xūruò
Although he is better, he is still very weak.

虽然道理已经讲清楚了，可是他仍然不听。

suīrán dào lǐ yǐjīng jiǎng qīngchū le | kěshì tā réngrán bù tīng
Although the reasons have been made clear, he still won't listen.

For more forceful expressions of concession, 虽然 **suīrán** can be replaced by the following adverbial-like conjunctions:

诚然 **chéngrán** 'it is true that':

建议诚然很好，但时机还不成熟。

jiànyì chéngrán hěn hǎo | dàn shíjī hái bù chéngshú
It's true that it's a good suggestion/idea, but the time is still not ripe.

固然 **gùrán** 'admittedly':

你的办法固然有很多优点，可是缺点仍然不少。

nǐde bànfǎ gùrán yǒu hěnduō yōudiǎn | kěshì quēdiǎn réngrán bùshǎo

Your method admittedly has many good points, but it still has quite a few defects/weaknesses.

就是 **jiùshì**/就算 **jiùsuàn** 'even if':

就算他表面上已经同意，他心里仍然不服。

jiùsuàn tā biǎomiàn shàng yǐjīng tóngyì | tā xīn lǐ réngrán bùfú
Even if he (already) outwardly agrees, he is still not convinced in his heart.

就是你已得到导师的支持，你还得听取校外考官的意见。

**jiùshì nǐ yǐ dédào dǎoshī de zhīchí | nǐ hái děi tīngqǔ xiàowài
kǎoguān de yìjiàn**

Even if you've already got the support of your tutor, you still need to hear the views of the external examiner.

即使 **jíshǐ** 'even if':

即使你做得很好，也不能骄傲自满。

jíshǐ nǐ zuò de hěn hǎo | yě bùnéng jiāo'ào zìmǎn

Even if you've done very well, you (still) can't be arrogant and smug.

哪怕 **nǎpà** 'even if':

哪怕天再冷，他还是只穿着一件衬衫。

nǎpà tiān zài lěng | tā háishi zhǐ chuān zhe yī jiàn chènshān

Even if it is even colder, he'll still be wearing only a shirt.

22.3.6 Defying setbacks: no matter

- (a) 无论 **wúlùn** (formal), 不管 **bùguǎn** (colloquial), or 凭 **píng** 'no matter what', first-clause conjunction, with choice depending on style or rhythm, and 都 **dōu**, or 也 **yě** 'still', or 还是 **háishi** 'still', etc., as second-clause conjunctive:

不管天气怎么冷，他还是坚持洗冷水澡。

bùguǎn tiānqì zěnmē lěng | tā háishi jiānchí xǐ lěngshuǐzǎo

No matter how cold the weather is, he still insists on having a cold bath.

无论语法(的)问题多么复杂，我们都能解释。

wúlùn yǔfǎ (de) wèntí duōme fùzá | wǒmen dōu néng jiěshì

No matter how complicated the grammatical problems are, we can always explain them.

无论情况如何，请您打电话告知。

wúlùn qíngkuàng rúhé | qǐng nín dǎ diànhuà gào zhī

No matter how things are, please telephone to say.

凭你走得怎么快，我也/都赶得上。

píng nǐ zǒu de zěnmē kuài | wǒ yě/dōu gǎn de shàng

No matter how fast you go, I can still catch up.

- (b) 反正 **fǎnzhèng** ‘under whatever circumstances, anyway’ may be used individually as either a first or second clause adverbial-like conjunction:

别着急，反正不是什么了不起的事儿。

bié zháojí | fǎnzhèng bù shì shénme liǎobuqǐ de shìr

Don't worry, it is not anything exceptional/special anyway.

反正今天没有什么要紧的事儿，咱们出去溜达溜达。

fǎnzhèng jīntiān méiyǒu shénme yàojǐn de shìr | zánmen chū qù liūda liūda

Anyway, there is nothing important on today, and we'll go out for a stroll.

22.3.7 Clarifying time: when, as soon as, after, before, etc.

- (a) ... 时 **shí** or ... 的时候 **de shíhou** ‘when ...’ is in fact a noun (phrase) employed as a pseudo-conjunction to introduce a time phrase or clause. 当 **dāng** is sometimes placed at the beginning of such a time clause.⁶ This usage, however, is dying out.

(当)太阳出来的时候，我就把衣服晾出去。

(dāng) tàiyáng chūlái de shíhou | wǒ jiù bǎ yīfu liàng chūqu
When the sun came out, I put the clothes out to dry.

(当)他进来时，我正在写信。

(dāng) tā jìnlái shí | wǒ zhèngzài xiě xìn
When he came in, I was just writing a letter.

行车的时候，请大家不要把手伸出窗外。⁷

xíng chē de shíhou | qǐng dàjiā bùyào bǎ shǒu shēnchū chuāngwài

When the train is moving, please would everyone not put your hands out of the window.

⁶ 当 **dāng** can only be attached to a time clause, but not a time phrase: e.g. 当你回来时 **dāng nǐ huí lái shí** ‘When you come back ...’, but not *当回来时 **dāng huí lái shí** ‘When coming back ...’.

⁷ Note that a conjunctive is not needed in the second clause of an imperative or interrogative sentence.

- (b) ... 后 **hòu** or 以后 **yǐhòu** or 之后 **zhīhòu** ‘after ...’ and ... 前 **qián** or 以前 **yǐqián** or 之前 **zhīqián** ‘before ...’ are likewise used to introduce time phrases or clauses. These time phrases or clauses are echoed

by the conjunctive 就 jiù ‘then’ in the second clause in declarative sentences:

病人吃药后，烧就退了。

bìng rén chī yào hòu | shāo jiù tuì le

After the patient took the medicine, the fever (then) subsided.

他回伦敦以后，就再也没有来过信。

tā huí lúndūn yǐhòu | jiù zài yě méiyǒu láiguó xìn

After he went back to London, he (then) never wrote again/he didn’t send any more letters.

下车前，请乘客检查自己的行李。

xià chē qián | qǐng chéngkè jiǎnchá zìjǐ de xíngli

Before getting off the bus/train, would passengers please check their (own) luggage.

开会之前，让我们为受难者默哀一分钟。

kāihuì zhīqián | ràng wǒmen wèi shòunànzhe mò’āi yī fēnzhōng

Before the meeting starts, let us have a moment’s silence for the victims.

- (c) 一 yī...就 jiù... ‘as soon as...’ may be regarded as a pair of conjunctives placed respectively before the verb in the first and second clause:

我一说他就明白了。

wǒ yī shuō tā jiù míngbai le

As soon as I said it, he (then) understood.

秋天一到，树上的叶子都掉下来了。

qiūtiān yī dào | shù shàng de yèzi dōu diào xiàlai le

As soon as autumn arrived, the leaves on the trees (all) began to fall.

- (d) 于是 yúshì ‘thereupon, and so’, 然后 ránhòu ‘after that, then’, 接着 jiēzhe ‘following that’, conjunctions positioned at the beginning of the second of a pair of clauses or sentences:

我们等了一会儿，他还没来。于是我们就离开了。

wǒmen děng le yīhuìr | tā hái méi lái | yúshì wǒmen jiù líkai le

We waited a while, (but) he still didn’t come, and so we (then) left.

他在银行自动提款机那儿取了款，然后(就)到酒吧间去喝酒了。

**tā zài yínháng zìdòng tíkuǎnjī nàr qǔ le kuǎn | ránhòu
(jiù) dào jiǔbājiān qù hē jiǔ le**

He withdrew some money from the automatic machine at the bank, and after that (then) went to drink in a bar.

她先搽点儿胭脂，涂上口唇膏，接着(便)戴上项链和戒指。

**tā xiān chá diǎnr yānzhi | tú shàng kǒuchúngāo | jiēzhe
(biàn) dài shàng xiàngliàn hé jièzhi**

She first applied a bit of rouge and lipstick, and following that (then) put on a necklace and ring.

- (e) The verb 等 děng ‘to wait for’ often serves as a pseudo-conjunction in the first clause meaning ‘wait until’. It is often echoed by the conjunctive 再 zài ‘then’ or 才 cái ‘only then’ in the second clause:

等雨停了再走吧。děng yǔ tíng le zài zǒu ba

Wait until the rain stops and then go.

咱们等下了班再详细谈吧。

zánmen děng xià le bān zài xiángxì tán ba

Let's wait until after office hours and then talk in detail.

他们等春天到了才把种子撒在地里。

tāmen děng chūntiān dào le cái bǎ zhǒngzi sǎ zài dì lǐ

They waited until spring arrived before [lit. only then] they scattered the seeds on the soil.

22.3.8 Indicating preference: would rather

宁可 nìngkě or 宁愿 nìngyuàn ‘would rather’ pre-verb, first-clause conjunction with 也不 yě bù as a pre-verb conjunctive in the second clause:

我宁可吃素，也不吃蜗牛。

wǒ nìngkě chī sù | yě bù chī wōniú

I would rather be a vegetarian than eat snails.

If the negative is in the first clause, then the second may be either negative with 也不 yě bù or positive with 也 yě on its own:

我宁愿不睡觉，也要把这个报告写完。

wǒ nìngyuàn bù shuìjiào | yě yào bǎ zhèi ge bàogào xiě wán

I would rather not sleep, than [lit. and want to] not finish writing this report.

今天我宁可不喝酒，也不能酒后驾车。

jīntiān wǒ nìngkě bù hē jiǔ | yě bùnéng jiǔhòu jià chē

I would rather not drink, than [lit. and be unable to] drive after drinking.

Preference may be expressed rather more objectively with the linked conjunctions 与其 yǔqí ‘instead of’... and 倒不如 dào bùrú ‘it’s better’...:

与甚出去看电影，倒不如在家看电视。

yǔqí chūqu kàn diànyǐng | dào bùrú zài jiā kàn diànshì

Instead of going out to see a film, it would be better to stay home and watch television.

Finally, choice may also be conveyed by pairing the negative 不 bù ‘not’ with the conjunction, 而 ér ‘but’:

他不开汽车而骑自行车上班。

tā bù kāi qìchē ér qí zìxíngchē shàngbān

He doesn’t drive but cycles to work.

她不用筷子而用刀叉吃饭。

tā bù yòng kuàizi ér yòng dāo chā chīfàn

She doesn’t use chopsticks but a knife and fork to eat.

22.3.9 *Elucidating one’s purpose: in order to, so as to, so as not to*

为了 wèile ‘in order to’ pre-verb, first-clause conjunction, with a relatively serious or forceful tone:

为了锻炼身体，他买了一副哑铃。

wèile duànliàn shēntǐ | tā mǎi le yī fù yǎlíng

In order to get fit, he bought a pair/set of dumbbells.

为了保护生态环境，他决定不开汽车，而骑自行车上班。

wèile bǎohù shēngtài huánjìng | tā juéding bù kāi qìchē | ér qí zìxíngchē shàngbān

In order to protect the (ecological) environment, he decided not to drive but to cycle to work.

Unstressed purpose is expressed by one verb following another:⁸

妈妈到市场去买菜。māma dào shìchǎng qù mǎi cài

Mother goes to the market to buy vegetables.

⁸ See Chapter 14 on verb chains.

One does not normally say:

+ 为了买菜，妈妈到市场去了。

+ wèile mǎi cài | māma dào shìchǎng qù le

An alternative is 以便 yǐbiàn ‘so as to’, pre-verb conjunction in the second clause:

他来看我，以便了解我对这个问题的看法。

tā lái kàn wǒ | yǐbiàn liǎojiě wǒ duì zhèi ge wèntí de kànfǎ

He came to see me so as to understand my view of this question.

Negative purpose is expressed by 以免 yǐmiǎn or 免得 miǎnde ‘so as to avoid’, also a pre-verb conjunction in the second clause:

我们提前出发，以免迟到。

wǒmen tíqián chūfā | yǐmiǎn chídào

We set out beforehand/early, to avoid arriving late.

他把收音机的音量开得很小，免得干扰隔壁的邻居。

tā bǎ shōuyīnjī de yīnliàng kāi de hěn xiǎo | miǎnde gānrǎo
gébì de línjū

He turned down the radio, to avoid disturbing the neighbours
next door.

22.3.10 Encoding miscellaneous relational concepts: apart from, let alone, otherwise

除了 chulé ‘apart from’ ... 以外 yǐwài or 之外 zhīwài ‘to exclude’, paired conjunctions in the first clause, surrounding a nominal, an adjectival or verbal expression or even a clause:

除了辣椒之外，什么蔬菜我都喜欢吃。

chulé làjiāo zhīwài | shénme shūcài wǒ dōu xǐhuan chī

Apart from chilli/hot pepper, I like any kind of vegetable.

这次旅行，除了天气不好之外，其他一切都很好。

zhèi cì lǚxíng | chulé tiānqì bù hǎo zhīwài | qítā yīqiè
dōu hěn hǎo

On this trip, apart from the weather being bad, everything else
was fine.

22.4 Correlations and parallels

In correlative or parallel constructions, the first clause and the second clause of a sentence share a lexical item, usually, but not necessarily, placed in the same position in each of the clauses. Sentences of this kind express coordination, continuation, progression, option, contrast, part-whole relationship, and so on.

谁弄坏，谁赔偿。 **shuí nòng huài | shuí péicháng**

(lit. who/anyone breaks, who/anyone pays)

Breakages must be paid for.

谁犯规就罚谁。 **shuí fànguī jiù fá shuí**

(lit. who/anyone break rules, then punish who/anyone)

Anyone breaking the rules will be punished.

哪里有火灾，救火车就开到哪里去。

nǎlǐ yǒu huǒzāi | jiùhuǒchē jiù kāi dào nǎlǐ qù

(lit. wherever there is a fire, fire engine then drive to wherever)

Wherever there's a fire, the fire-engine will go.

从哪里拿来就放回到哪里去。

cóng nǎlǐ ná lái jiù fàng huí dào nǎlǐ qù

(lit. from wherever take then put back to wherever)

Put (things) back where they came from.

说明书上怎么说，我就怎么装。

shuōmíngshū shàng zěnně shuō | wǒ jiù zěnně zhuāng

(lit. manual-on how say, I then how assemble)

I assemble it how the manual says.

他们一边喝酒，一边聊天。

tāmen yībiān hējiǔ | yībiān liáotiān

(lit. they one-side drink wine one-side chat)

They chatted as they drank.

气球越升越高。 **qìqiú yuè shēng yuè gāo**

(lit. balloon the more rose the more high)

The balloon rose higher and higher.

天气越来越热。⁹ **tiānqì yuè lái yuè rè**

(lit. weather the more become the more hot)

The weather grew hotter and hotter.

⁹ In 越 yuè . . . 越 yuè 'the more . . . the more' parallel construction, if a meaningful verb is lacking after the first 越 yuè, the gap is filled by the dummy verb 来 lái 'become'.

这种苹果又硬又酸。

zhèi zhǒng píngguǒ yòu yìn yòu suān

(lit. this kind apple also hard also sour)

This kind/variety of apple is both hard and sour.

或者这样，或者那样，总得有个结论。

huòzhě zhèyàng | huòzhě nàiyàng | zǒngděi yǒu ge jiélùn

(lit. either this mw:way, or that mw:way, must have (a) mw conclusion)

Whether this way or that, there must be a conclusion.

要么去，要么不去，你得拿定主意。

yàome qù | yàome bù qù | nǐ děi náding zhǔyi

(lit. either go, or not go, you must make up your mind)

You must make up your mind whether you are going or not.

她不是唱歌，就是跳舞，一刻也不停。

tā bùshì chànggē | jiùshì tiàowǔ | yīkè yě bù tíng

(lit. she is not sing, then is dance, one moment even not stop)

She was either singing or dancing without a moment's stop.

有的学生学得好，有的学生学得不好，程度参差不齐。

yǒude xuésheng xué de hǎo | yǒude xuésheng xué de bù hǎo

| chéngdù cēncī bù qí

(lit. some students study **de** well, some students study **de** not well,
standard uneven)

Some students studied well and others didn't, and the standard was uneven.

22.5 Zero connectives

Clauses in Chinese also come together without any explicit connective marker (conjunction or conjunctive) to link them. This happens when the two clauses are set in apposition to each other and the meaning of the second clause is in some way sequential on the meaning of the first. These meanings cover the whole range of those listed in §22.3 for conjunctions and conjunctives:

十几年没见了，她还是那么年轻。

shí jǐ nián méi jiàn le | tā háishi nàme niánqīng (concession)

(lit. ten and more years not see **le**, she still like that young)

Though (I) have not seen (her) for ten or more years, she is still the same as she was.

时间不早了，咱们走吧。

shíjiān bù zǎo le | zánmen zǒu ba (cause)

(lit. time not early **le**, we go **ba**)

As time is getting on, let's go.

你稍等一会儿，我马上就来。

nǐ shāo děng yīhuìr | wǒ mǎshàng jiù lái (condition)

(lit. you a little wait a moment, I immediately then come)

If you will wait a moment, I will be with you shortly.

他刚想出去，忽然下起大雪来了。

tā gāng xiǎng chūqù | hūrán xià qǐ dà xuě lai le (time)

(lit. he just think out-go, suddenly fall begin heavy snow come **le**)

When he was just thinking of going out it suddenly began to snow heavily.

Many formalised or proverbial sayings adopt zero-connective constructions:

欲知后事如何，且听下回分解。

yù zhī hòushì rúhé | qiě tīng xiàhuí fēnjiě (supposition)

(lit. want know afterwards matters like what, then listen next chapter recounting)

If you want to know what happens next, listen to the next chapter.

[a storyteller's expression]

前人种树，后人乘凉。

qiánrén zhòng shù | hòurén chéng liáng (cause)

(lit. previous people plant trees, latter people take advantage of cool)

Because earlier people planted trees, those who came later could enjoy the cool.

不打不相识。**bù dǎ bù xiāngshí** (cause)

(lit. not fight not mutually know) No discord, no concord.

人不可貌相，海水不可斗量。

rén bùkě mào xiàng | hǎishuǐ bùkě dòu liáng (comparison)

(lit. people not able judge from appearance, sea water not able measure with a cup in bushels)

People can't be judged from appearances as the sea can't be measured in bushels.

(Still waters run deep/great minds can't be fathomed.)

说到曹操，曹操就到。**shuō dào cáocāo | cáocāo jiù dào** (coincidence)

(lit. talk about **Cao Cao**, **Cao Cao** then comes) Talk of the devil.

Interrogative sentences

There are various ways of asking questions in Chinese, but a common feature of all of them is that there is no inversion of word order, which remains the same as in corresponding statements. To formulate a question, you can add an interrogative particle at the end of a statement, introduce a question word at the point in the sentence where the answer would come, or pose alternatives, in particular in the form of an affirmative–negative verb.

In the following sections, we shall discuss in detail the various types of questions.

23.1 Yes–no questions

Yes–no questions are based on some form of assumption on the part of the questioner, who is generally expecting a yes–no answer. They are formulated by adding the question particle 吗 *ma* at the end of a statement. For example:

- statement: 这辆是开往上海的火车。
zhè liàng shì kāiwǎng shànghǎi de huǒchē
(lit. this mw is bound for Shanghai *de* train)
This is the train to Shanghai.
- question: 这辆是开往上海的火车吗
zhè liàng shì kāiwǎng shànghǎi de huǒchē ma
Is this the train to Shanghai?
- statement: 她买了两张火车票。
tā mǎi le liǎng zhāng huǒchēpiào
She bought two railway tickets.
- question: 她买了两张火车票吗?
tā mǎi le liǎng zhāng huǒchēpiào ma
Did she buy two railway tickets?

If the focus of a yes–no question is on the predicate, the answer is usually expressed by repeating the verb or adjective in the affirmative or negative. Where a modal verb is present, the response repeats the modal verb rather than the main verb. Here are some examples:

question	answer		
你是英国人吗? nǐ shì yīngguó rén ma Are you English?	是 shì	or	不是 bù shì No.
你有证明吗? nǐ yǒu zhèngmíng ma Have you got any proof/identity?	有 yǒu Yes, I have.	or	没有 méiyǒu No, I haven't.
你吃了早饭了吗? nǐ chī le zǎofàn le ma Have you had your breakfast?	吃了 chī le Yes, I have.	or	还没(有) hái méi(yǒu) Not yet.
你去过中国吗? nǐ qù guo zhōngguó ma Have you ever been to China?	去过 qù guo Yes, I have.	or	没(有)去过 méi(yǒu) qù guo No, I haven't.
你累吗? nǐ lèi ma Are you tired?	累(呀) lèi (ya) Yes, I am.	or	不累 bù lèi Not, I am not.
她送你的领带漂亮吗? tā sòng nǐ de lǐngdài piàoliang ma Is the tie she gave you attractive?	很 ¹ 漂亮 hěn piàoliang Yes, it is.	or	不漂亮 bù piàoliang No, it isn't.
我可以进来吗? wǒ kěyǐ jìnlái ma May I come in?	可以 kěyǐ Yes. (lit. may)	or	不可以 bù kěyǐ No. (lit. not may)

¹ Normally a degree adverb is built into the affirmative answer to take away implication of contrast.

If the focus of such a question is shifted to anything other than the predicate, e.g. the subject, object, adverbial or complement in the sentence, the reply is likely to be 是(的) **shì (de)** ‘Yes, it is’ or 不(是) **bù (shì)** ‘No, it isn’t’.

你 <u>姐姐</u> 也来吗? nǐ jiějie yě lái ma Is your sister coming too?	是的。 shì de Yes, she is.	or	不是。 bù shì No, she isn't.
--	--------------------------------------	----	--

他明天上北京去吗?

tā míngtiān shàng**běijīng qù ma**

Is he going to Beijing tomorrow?

是的。

shì de

Yes, he is.

or

不是。

bù shì

No, he isn't.

你同意我的意见吗?

nǐ tóngyì wǒde yìjiàn ma

Do you agree with my opinion?

是的。

shì de

Yes

or

不是。

bù shì

No

question

answer

这儿冬天很冷吗?

zhèr dōngtiān hěn lěng ma

Is it very cold here in winter?

是的。

shì de

Yes

or

不是。

bù shì

No

你天天都锻炼身体吗?

nǐ tiāntiān dōu duànliàn shēntǐ ma

Do you do physical exercises every day?

是的。

shì de

Yes

or

不是。

Bù shì

No

你去见你的导师吗?

nǐ qù jiàn nǐde dǎoshī ma

Are you going to see your supervisor?

是的。

shì de

Yes

or

不是。

Bù shì

No

他喝醉了吗?

tā hē zuì le ma

Is he drunk?

是的。

shì de

Yes

or

不是。

bù shì

No

23.2 Surmise questions

If the question has the particle 吧² *ba* rather than 吗 *ma*, it embodies a presumption rather than an assumption, and it conveys a surmise with the speaker presuming that what is stated in the question must or must not be the case.

你是李教授吧? **nǐ shì lǐ jiàoshòu ba**

You must be Professor Li?

你不是李教授吧? **nǐ bùshì lǐ jiàoshòu ba**

You aren't Professor Li, are you?

² For the use of 吧 *ba* in imperatives, see [Chapter 24](#).

Here are some more examples:

他大概不来了吧? **tā dàgài bù lái le ba**

He probably isn't coming, is he?

你是吃素的吧? **nǐ shì chīsù de ba**

You are a vegetarian, aren't you?

这是你新买的吧? **zhè shì nǐ xīn mǎi de ba**

You have just bought this, haven't you?

这个消息靠得住吧? **zhèi ge xiāoxi kào de zhù ba**

This news is reliable, isn't it?

A negative question with 吗 *ma* in fact also expresses a degree of positive surmise:³

你不是李教授吗? **nǐ bùshì lǐ jiàoshòu ma**

Aren't you Professor Li?

你下星期不来吗? **nǐ xià xīngqī bù lái ma**

Aren't you coming next week?

³ See §23.8 on rhetorical questions.

23.3 Suggestions in the form of questions

Suggestions are often couched in the form of questions. The usual formulation is for a statement of intent to be followed by a question such as 好吗 *hǎo ma*, 行不行⁴ *xíng bù xíng* and 怎么样 *zěnmeyàng*.

咱们一起去看电影，好吗?

zánmen yīqǐ qù kàn diànyǐng | hǎo ma

(lit. we together go see film, all right *ma*)

Let's go and see a film together.

你帮一下我的忙，行不行?

nǐ bāng yīxià wǒde máng | xíng bù xíng

(lit. you help one mw:time my busy, will do or not)

Can you give me some help?

咱们今晚去喝杯啤酒，怎么样?

zánmen jīnwǎn qù hē bēi píjiǔ | zěnmeyàng

(lit. we this evening go drink (one) mw:glass beer, how about that)

Let's go and have a beer tonight./How about going to have a beer tonight?

⁴ On affirmative-negative expressions like 好不好 *hǎo bù hǎo* 'OK?', 行不行 *xíng bù xíng* 'Will that do?', and so on, see §23.5 below.

23.4 Alternative questions

Alternative questions pose two alternative possibilities expressed in the same format with the pivotal interrogative 还是 **háishi** ‘... or ...’ between them:

question	answer
你要红茶还是要绿茶? nǐ yào hóngchá háishi yào lǜchá Do you want black tea or green tea?	我要红茶。 wǒ yào hóngchá I want black tea.

你想喝红茶还是想喝绿茶?

nǐ xiǎng hē hóngchá háishi xiǎng hē lǜchá

Would you like (to drink) black tea or green tea?

咱们坐汽车去还是坐火车去?

zánmen zuò qìchē qù háishi zuò huǒchē qù

Shall we go by car or by train?

他今天走还是明天走? **tā jīntiān zǒu háishi míngtiān zǒu**

Is he going/leaving today or tomorrow?

今年圣诞节是星期四还是星期五?⁵

jīnnián shèngdànjié shì xīngqī sì háishi xīngqī wǔ

Is Christmas this year on Thursday or Friday?

他给钱还是我们给钱? **tā gěi qián háishi wǒmen gěi qián**

Is he paying or are we?

⁵ If the verb used in an alternative question is 是 **shì**, it does not need to be repeated in the alternative part. For example, one does not say: *今年圣诞节是星期四还是是星期五? *jīnnián shèngdànjié shì xīngqī sì háishi shì xīngqī wǔ.

Answers to affirmative-negative questions are usually given in full with the verb as the first example shows.

23.5 Affirmative-negative questions

General enquiries are also expressed by affirmative-negative questions, which suggest a yes or no alternative to the listener by using the affirmative and negative form of the verbal phrase in an alternating sequence:

question	answer		
你去不去看球赛? nǐ qù bù qù kàn qiú sài [Likewise] (lit. you go not go see game) Are you going to the game?	去。 qù	or	不去。 bù qù Yes, I am. No, I am not.

你吃不吃羊肉? **nǐ chī bù chī yáng ròu**
(lit. you eat not eat lamb) Do you eat lamb?

我们打球，你来不来? **wǒmen dǎ qiú | nǐ lái bù lái**
(lit. we hit ball, you come not come)
We are going for a game, are you coming?

这个问题你清楚不清楚?
zhèi ge wèntí nǐ qīngchū bù qīngchū
(lit. this mw question you clear not clear)
Are you clear about this question?

我有个办法，你们大家看行不行?
wǒ yǒu ge bànfǎ | nǐmen dàjiā kàn xíng bù xíng
(lit. I have mw way, you everybody see work not work)
I have a plan. Do you all think it will work?

你冷不冷? **nǐ lěng bù lěng**
(lit. you cold not cold) Are you cold?

这双球鞋是不是你的?
zhèi shuāng qiúxié shì bù shì nǐde
(lit. this pair ball-shoes is not is yours)
Is this pair of trainers/sneakers yours?

你身上有没有零钱?
nǐ shēnshang yǒu méiyǒu língqián
(lit. your body-on have not have change)
Do you have any change on you?

If there is a modal verb before the main verb, it is the modal verb that takes the affirmative and negative form:

你想不想去看球赛? **nǐ xiǎng bù xiǎng qù kàn qiú sài**
(lit. you like not like go see game) Would you like to go to the game?

你会不会滑冰? **nǐ huì bù huì huá bīng**
(lit. you can not can skate ice) Can you skate?

If the verb or modal verb used in the question is disyllabic, the second syllable of the affirmative verb may be omitted:

你打算不打算在这儿待下去? **nǐ dǎ bù dǎsuàn zài zhèr dāi xiàqu**
Do you intend to stay here?

instead of:

你打算不打算在这儿待下去?
nǐ dǎsuàn bù dǎsuàn zài zhèr dāi xiàqu

你喜不喜欢看电视剧? **nǐ xǐ bù xǐhuan kàn diànshìjù**
Do you like (watching) television plays?

instead of:

你喜欢不喜欢看电视剧? **nǐ xǐhuan bù xǐhuan kàn diànshìjù**

Answers to affirmative-negative questions are simply repetitions of the verb in the positive or negative, similar to those given to yes-no questions (see §23.1 above).

23.6 Question-word questions

The common question words in Chinese are:

who/ whom	what	which	how/by what means	when
谁 shéi/shuí	什么 shénme	哪 + mw něi	怎么 zěnmē 怎样 zěnyàng 怎么样 zěnmeyàng	什么时候 shénme shíhou 几时 jǐshí
where	why	how (+ adj.)	how many	how long (of time)
哪儿 nǎr / 哪里 nǎli 什么地方 shénme dìfang	为什么 wèi shénme 干吗 gàn má	多 duō	多少 + mw duōshǎo 几 + mw jǐ	多长时间 duōshǎo shíjiān 多长时间 duōcháng shíjiān 多久 duōjiǔ

The question word is normally placed in the sentence at the point where the required information would be provided in the corresponding statement, and there is no change of word order. Take a statement like the following:

小张昨天在商场买了两件衬衫。

xiǎozhāng zuótiān zài shāngchǎng mǎi le liǎng jiàn chènshān

Little Zhang bought two shirts in the market yesterday.

A number of questions can be constructed on the basis of this sentence.

谁昨天在商场买了两件衬衫？

shuí zuótiān zài shāngchǎng mǎi le liǎng jiàn chènshān

Who bought two shirts yesterday in the market?

小张什么时候在商场买了两件衬衫？

xiǎozhāng shénme shíhou zài shāngchǎng mǎi le liǎng jiàn chènshān

When did Little Zhang buy two shirts in the market?

小张昨天在哪儿买了两件衬衫？

xiǎozhāng zuótiān zài nǎr mǎi le liǎng jiàn chènshān

Where did Little Zhang buy two shirts yesterday?

小张昨天在商场做什么？

xiǎozhāng zuótiān zài shāngchǎng zuò shénme

What did Little Zhang do yesterday in the market?

小张昨天在商场买了几件衬衫？

xiǎozhāng zuótiān zài shāngchǎng mǎi le jǐ jiàn chènshān

How many shirts did Little Zhang buy yesterday in the market?

小张昨天在商场买了两件什么？

xiǎozhāng zuótiān zài shāngchǎng mǎi le liǎng jiàn shénme

What two things did Little Zhang buy yesterday in the market?

It is clear from these examples that, while the English word order of the translation is adjusted in each case, the Chinese sentence retains the same format with the question word inserted at the appropriate point.

The only exceptions to this are 为什么 *wèi shénme* and 干吗 *gàn má* ‘why’, which are placed anywhere in front of the verb, depending on emphasis.

为什么小张昨天在商场买了两件衬衫？

wèi shénme xiǎozhāng zuótiān zài shāngchǎng mǎi le liǎng jiàn chènshān

Why did Little Zhang buy two shirts yesterday in the market?

小张为什么昨天在商场买了两件衬衫?

xiǎozhāng wèi shénme zuótiān zài shāngchǎng mǎi le liǎng jiàn chènshān

Why did Little Zhang buy two shirts yesterday in the market?

小张昨天为什么在商场买了两件衬衫?

xiǎozhāng zuótiān wèi shénme zài shāngchǎng mǎi le liǎng jiàn chènshān

Why did Little Zhang buy two shirts yesterday in the market?

小张昨天在商场为什么买了两件衬衫?

xiǎozhāng zuótiān zài shāngchǎng wèi shénme mǎi le liǎng jiàn chènshān

Why did Little Zhang buy two shirts yesterday in the market?

Some general examples of question-word questions:

你是谁? **nǐ shì shuí**

Who are you?

你的导师是谁? **nǐde dǎoshī shì shuí**

Who is your supervisor/tutor?

谁是你的导师? **shuí shì nǐde dǎoshī**

Who is your supervisor/tutor?

你打算跟谁一起去? **nǐ dǎsuan gēn shuí yīqǐ qù**

Who do you intend to go with?

你姓什么? **nǐ xìng shénme**

What is your (sur)name?

你去哪国旅行? **nǐ qù nǎ/něi guó lǚxíng**

Which country are you going to on your travels?

哪个是你的? **nǎ/něi ge shì nǐde**

Which one is yours?

你准备怎么去? **nǐ zhǔnbèi zěnmeyàng qù**

How do you plan to go?

那儿的气候怎么样? **nàr de qìhòu zěnmeyàng**

What is the weather like there?

你几时上班? **nǐ jǐshí shàngbān**

When do you go to work?

今年什么时候开学? **jīnnián shénme shíhou kāixué**

When does school start this year?

下星期几举行毕业典礼? **xià xīngqī jǐ jǔxíng bìyè diǎnlǐ**
What day next week is the graduation ceremony being held?

这个图书馆有多少书? **zhèi ge túshūguǎn yǒu duōshao shū**
How many books does this library have?

你去哪儿? **nǐ qù nǎr**
Where are you going?

你是什么地方(的)人? **nǐ shì shénme dìfang (de) rén**
Where are you from?

你为什么不去参加舞会?
nǐ wèi shénme bù qù cānjiā wǔhuì
Why didn't you go to the party?

埃菲尔铁塔有多高? **āifēi'ěr tiětǎ yǒu duō gāo**
How high is the Eiffel Tower?

你准备在那儿待多久? **nǐ zhǔnbèi zài nàr dāi duōjiǔ**
How long do you plan to stay there?

If the particle 呢 *ne* is added to the end of these question-word questions, the enquiry tends to become more of a query as though the questioner may need to be convinced.

你准备怎么去呢? **nǐ zhǔnbèi zěnmē qù ne**
How are you planning to go then?

你准备在那儿待多少时间呢?
nǐ zhǔnbèi zài nàr dāi duōshǎo shíjiān ne
So how long are you planning to stay there?

你打算跟谁一起去呢? **nǐ dāsuan gēn shuí yìqǐ qù ne**
Who do you intend to go with then?

那儿的气候怎么样呢? **nàr de qìhòu zěnmeyàng ne**
So what is the weather like there?

23.7 Follow-up queries with 呢 *ne*

Questions like 'and how about . . .', 'and what about . . .', etc., which are asked in a given situation or context, are expressed by simply placing the particle 呢 *ne* after the object, person, etc., that is of concern. For example:

(她喝咖啡。 **tā hē kāfēi**) 你呢? **nǐ ne**
(She's having coffee.) What about you?

(明天不行。míngtiān bù xíng) 后天呢? hòutiān ne
(Tomorrow's no good.) How about day after tomorrow?

(大家都来了。dàjiā dōu lái le) 李先生呢? lǐ xiānsheng ne
(Everyone has come.) What about Mr Li?

(我同意。wǒ tóngyi) 你的朋友呢? nǐde péngyou ne
(I agree.) What about your friend?

(开门吧。kāi mén ba) 钥匙呢? yàoshi ne
(Open the door!) Where's the key?

(真奇怪。zhēn qíguài) 我的大衣呢? wǒde dàyī ne
(This is really strange!) Where is my overcoat?

23.8 Rhetorical questions

Rhetorical questions with their challenge to the hearer to disagree are often marked in Chinese by the presence of the sentence adverb 难道 *nándào* 'is it possible to say',⁶ which is used in conjunction with the end-of-sentence interrogative particle, 吗 *ma*.

这件事儿难道你不知道吗?
zhèi jiàn shìr nándào nǐ bù zhīdao ma
Do you mean you don't know about this?

那么重要的事儿难道你忘了吗?
nèime zhòngyào de shìr nándào nǐ wàng le ma
Do you mean to say you have forgotten about something so important?

妈妈难道还不懂得孩子的脾气吗?
māma nándào hái bù dǒngde hái'izi de píqi ma
Does mother still not understand a child's temper?

难道世界上真有这样的事儿吗?
nándào shìjiè shàng zhēn yǒu zhèyàng de shìr ma
Can there really be something like this in the world?

⁶ Being an adverb, 难道 *nándào* may be placed anywhere before the verb. For example:

这件事儿难道你不知道吗?	zhèi jiàn shìr nándào nǐ bù zhīdao ma
难道这件事儿你不知道吗?	nándào zhèi jiàn shìr nǐ bù zhīdao ma
这件事儿你难道不知道吗?	zhèi jiàn shìr nǐ nándào bù zhīdao ma

难道天上真的有上帝吗?

nándào tiānshàng zhēn de yǒu shàngdì ma

Is there really a god in heaven?

In fact, all questions couched in the negative have a rhetorical effect:

你不怕她生气吗? **nǐ bù pà tā shēngqì ma**

Aren't you afraid she'll get angry?

他不会不守信用吧? **tā bù huì bù shǒu xìnyòng ba**

She is bound to keep her promise, isn't she?

这样说岂非自相矛盾? **zhèyàng shuō qǐfēi zì xiāng máodùn**

Isn't it self-contradictory to say this?

23.9 Exclamatory questions

Exclamatory questions, expressing surprise, doubt, insistence, etc., generally have a particle like 啊 ā, 呀 yā, 啦 lā, etc.⁷ at the end of the sentence. And they often include an adverb like 究竟 jiūjìng, 到底 dàodǐ 'after all'.

这是怎么回事啊? **zhè shì zěnmē huí shì ā**

What's going on?

你究竟吃不吃呀? **nǐ jiūjìng chī bù chī yā**

Are you going to eat (it) (after all) or not?

你干吗不早说呀? **nǐ gàn má bù zǎo shuō yā**

Why on earth didn't you say earlier?

他是不是回去啦? **tā shì bù shì huí qù lā**

Is it true that he's gone back home?

到底是哪一天哪? **dàodǐ shì nǐ yī tiān na**

What day is it then?

⁷ The particles in these questions like those in exclamations have phonetic and graphemic variants depending on the preceding vowel or consonant (see [Chapter 24](#)).

Chapter 24

Imperatives and exclamations

Similar to questions, imperatives and exclamations in Chinese are also very much based on notional corresponding statements for their word order. For an imperative, the obvious major difference is the regular addition of a ‘request’ or ‘hope’ expression at the beginning and a different set of particles at the end. For example:

- (a) A ‘request’ word at the beginning:

请坐! **qǐng zuò**
Please sit.

- (b) A particle at the end:

坐下巴! **zuò xià ba**
Sit down.

- (c) A ‘request’ word at the beginning as well as a particle at the end:

请坐下吧! **qǐng zuò xià ba**
Please sit down.

An exclamation is likely to have an interjection at the beginning and a particle at the end of the sentence:

啊! 真好哇! **ā | zhēn hǎo wa**
Hey, it's really good.

Both imperatives and exclamations belong to the realm of topic–comment constructions: the former, where it is present, making explicit the speaker’s authoritative attitude to the situation in hand, and the latter, the speaker’s emotional response. The employment of end-of-sentence particles, as on all other occasions reveals the committed and emotional nature of what is being said.

In the following sections, we will discuss the various types of imperatives and exclamations.

24.1 Verbs in imperatives restricted to voluntary actions

Not every verb in the language can be used in imperatives, only verbs expressing voluntary actions that are controllable. In other words, they are requests for action that is achievable or possible. For example:

请把窗户打开! **qǐng bǎ chuānghu dǎkāi**
Please open the window.

别锁门! **bié suǒ mén**
Don't lock the door.

*请晕倒! **qǐng yūn dǎo**
*Please faint!

24.2 Imperatives: beginners and end-particles

Imperatives are generally face-to-face interlocutions, and the person addressed is usually left out. For example:

请喝茶! **qǐng hē chá**
Please have some tea.

不要打搅他! **bùyào dǎjiǎo tā**
Don't disturb him!

请别¹说话! **qǐng bié shuōhuà**
Please shut up.

¹ 别 **bié** 'don't' is the monosyllabic fusion of the original disyllabic expression 不要 **bùyào** 'don't'.

The addressee must obviously be identified, if there is more than one person present, or ambiguity might arise:

请您回答这个问题! **qǐng nín huídá zhèi ge wèntí**
Please would you answer the question!

你过来! **nǐ guò lái**
You come over here.

If a request is made to everybody present, the expression used is 大家 **dàjiā** or 各位 **gèwèi**:

请大家保持安静! **qǐng dàjiā bǎochí ānjìng**

Would everyone please keep quiet.

请各位不要离开自己的座位!

qǐng gèwèi bùyào líkāi zìjǐ de zuòwèi

Please would you all not leave your seats.

Opening ‘request’ words like 请 **qǐng** ‘please’, 别 **bié** ‘don’t’, etc., are usually included if the instruction is initiated by the speaker. If it is a response to a move or request initiated by the addressee, the end-of-sentence particle 吧 **ba** is used:

进来吧! **jìn lái ba**

Come in!

你先走吧! **nǐ xiān zǒu ba**

You go ahead!

好吧! **hǎo ba**

All right.

甭 **béng** ‘don’t’, which is a phonetic fusion of the disyllabic 不用 **bùyòng** ‘there’s no need to’ corresponds to 别 **bié** ‘don’t’:

你甭管! **nǐ béng guǎn**

(lit. you no-need look-after)

Mind your own business!

这件事, 你甭操心! **zhèi jiàn shì | nǐ béng cāoxīn**

(lit. this mw matter, you no-need worry-about)

Don’t worry about this!

Such imperatives, being responses to the actions and attitudes of others, will usually have to include the addressee, and 甭 **béng** ‘there’s no need to’ would therefore not normally be used on its own:

*甭担心! ***béng dānxīn**

*Don’t worry!

A further point on 吧 **ba** is that, as well as giving consent, it is also commonly used to make suggestions:

咱们走吧! **zánmen zǒu ba**

Let’s go.

让我来跟你做个伴儿吧。 **ràng wǒ lái gēn nǐ zuò ge bànr ba**
Let me be your companion.

我替你满上这杯吧。 **wǒ tì nǐ mǎn shàng zhè bēi ba**
Let me fill your glass./Let me fill this glass for you.

In addition to 吧 *ba* with its meaning of consent or suggestion, there are three other end-of-imperative particles: 啊 *ā* (and its phonetic variants), which conveys eagerness or impatience for an action to be carried out, or a general state of urgency; 着 *zhe*, which urges the addressee to persist in a state he or she is already in or about to get into; and 了 *le*, which presses for the cessation or change of activity. Here are some detailed examples

- (a) 啊 *ā* (and its variants 呀 *ya*, 哪 *na*, 啦 *la*, 嘞 *lei*, 喽 *lou*, etc. which all link phonetically with the previous syllable)² express urgency on the part of the speaker:

救命啊! **jiùmìng ā**
Help!/Save me!

来人哪! **lái rén na**
(lit. come someone) Come and help!

别说啦! **bié shuō la**
Don't say anything any more!

快来呀! **kuài lái ya**
(lit. quick come) Hurry!

走嘞! **zǒu lei**
Let's go!

大家都坐好喽! **dàjiā dōu zuò hǎo lou**
Everyone sit down, please!

² See §24.5 below.

- (b) 着 *zhe* may be used only with verbs that do not involve movement. In other words, the request is made to the addressee to maintain a certain state or position. 着 *zhe* imperatives are usually extremely brief so as to drive the point home:

- (i) maintaining a situation:

坐着! (别站起来!)
zuò zhe (bié zhàn qǐlái)
Stay sitting! (Don't stand up!)

请等着! (不要离开!) **qǐng děng zhe (bùyào líkāi)**
Please keep waiting! (Don't leave!)

穿着! (别脱下来!) **chuān zhe (bié tuō xiàlai)**
Keep it on! (Don't take it off!)

(ii) holding on to something:

拿着! **ná zhe**
Keep hold (of it)!

放着! **fàng zhe**
Leave (it) where it is!

记着! **jì zhe**
Remember!

Verbs indicating continuous movement naturally do not occur as imperatives with 着 *zhe*:

*走着! ***zǒu zhe**

*说着! ***shuō zhe**

(c) 了 *le* imperatives urge an immediate stop or change:

好了, 好了, 别吵了! **hǎo le | hǎo le | bié chǎo le**
Enough is enough. Stop arguing!

不要哭了! **bùyào kū le**
Stop crying!

吃饭了! **chī fàn le**
Food's up!

集合了! **jíhé le**
Fall in!

Because of the advisory nature of 了 *le* imperatives, they are more often than not prohibitions or suggestions to put a stop to less desirable actions or conditions. They are therefore mostly negative imperatives with 别 *bié*, etc.:

你别骗我了! **nǐ bié piàn wǒ le**
Stop cheating/deceiving me!

别开他的玩笑了! **bié kāi tāde wánxiào le**
Don't tease him!

不要生气了! **bùyào shēngqì le**
Don't get angry!

The end-of-imperative particle 呗 *bei* ‘then’ is generally used after some form of a condition has been established:

不懂，就好好学呗！ *bù dǒng | jiù hǎohǎo xué bei*
If you don’t understand, then study hard!

你既然知道他的脾气，就别再去惹他呗！
nǐ jìrán zhīdao tāde píqì | jiù bié zài qǔ rě tā bei
As you know what he’s like, don’t provoke him again!

An imperative without a ‘request’ beginner or a terminating particle sounds extremely harsh or rude, and is usually either a command or a threat:

立正！ *lìzhèng*
Attention!

坐下！ *zuò xià*
Sit (down)!

滚出去！ *gǔn chūqu*
Get out!

别动！ *bié dòng*
Don’t move!

A reiterated or reduplicated imperative with or without a beginner or a particle has the tone of a gentle invitation or plea. Such imperatives are never couched in the negative:

坐，坐，坐！ *zuò | zuò | zuò*
Sit down, sit down.

帮帮我吧！ *bāngbāng wǒ ba*
Give me a hand./Help me.

你好好地想(一)想吧！ *nǐ hǎohǎo de xiǎng (yī) xiǎng ba*
Think about it!

请你再等一等吧！ *qǐng nǐ zài děng yī děng ba*
Please wait a bit longer!

24.3 Spoken and written requests

‘Request’ beginners, apart from 请 *qǐng* ‘please’, and end-of-imperative particles are not used in written requests or prohibitions. Public notices about laws and regulations are generally brief and blunt and do not require

the emotional colouring provided by particles, etc. In addition, prohibitions are expressed by the more classical 勿 **wù** ‘do not’, 莫 **mò** ‘not to’, 不准 **bù zhǔn** ‘not allowed’, etc. rather than 别 **bié** ‘don’t’:

闲人莫进 **xiánrén mò jìn**

(lit. casual people don’t enter) Staff only.

勿触展品 **wù chù zhǎnpǐn**

Don’t touch the exhibits!

请勿在此停车

qǐng wù zàicǐ tíng chē

No parking (please here).

不准乱丢果皮纸屑

bùzhǔn luàn diū guǒpí zhǐxiè

(lit. not allow indiscriminately drop fruit skin paper scraps) No litter.

禁止吸烟 **jìnzhǐ xīyān**

(lit. forbid smoke) No smoking.

请遵守会场秩序 **qǐng zūnshǒu huìchǎng zhìxù**

Please respect the rules of the premises.

请勿携带儿童入场

qǐng wù xiédài értóng rùchǎng

No children./Please don’t bring children in.

In letters, imperatives do not normally incorporate particles. They may begin with 请 **qǐng** ‘please’, or perhaps more often with 希 **xī** or 望 **wàng** ‘hope’:

请原谅。 **qǐng yuánliàng**

Please forgive me.

万望光临指导。

wàn wàng guānglín zhǐdǎo

(lit. ten-thousand hope honour-us-with-your-presence advise)

I/We very much hope you will come and advise me/us.

务希拨冗出席。

wù xī bōrǒng chūxí

(lit. earnestly hope set-aside busy-schedule attend)

Your presence is cordially requested.

敬请来信指教。

jìng qǐng lái xìn zhǐjiào

You are respectfully invited to write and instruct (me/us).

24.4 Interjections and exclamatory expressions

The shortest exclamations are simply interjections. Long exclamatory expressions tend to take the form of established expletives relating to specific situations.

Some interesting features of interjections in Chinese are:

(a) they are mostly monosyllabic:

哎 āi	Look out!	哎，前面有车！ āi qiánmiàn yǒu chē Look out, there's a car coming!
哼 hng	Humph!	哼，有什么了不起！ hng yǒu shénme liǎobuqǐ Humph, what's so wonderful!

(b) the few disyllabic ones all have level tones: e.g.:

嗨哟 hāiyō	Heave ho!	嗨哟，加油哇！ hāiyō jiāyóu wa Go! Go!
哼唷 hēngyō	Heave ho!	
哎呀 āiyā	Gosh; Damn it!	哎呀，电脑坏了。 āiyā diànnǎo huài le Damn it, the computer is broken
哎哟 āiyō	Ouch!	哎哟，疼死我啦！ āiyō téng sǐ wǒ la Ouch, it hurts!
喔唷 ōyō	Ouch!	

(c) monosyllabic interjections are extremely tone sensitive. A syllable, represented by the same grapheme in writing, may adopt different tones for different emotions, e.g.:

啊 ā	expressing surprise	啊，下雪啦！ ā xià xuě la Oh. It's snowing.
啊 á	pressing a point	啊？你说什么？ á nǐ shuō shénme Eh? What did you say?
啊 ǎ	expressing query	啊？这是怎么回事啊？ ǎ zhè shì zěnmé huí shì a Eh? What's going on?

啊 à	[shorter fall] agreement [longer fall] sudden revelation	啊，好吧。à hǎo ba Oh, OK. 啊，原来是你。 à yuánlái shì nǐ Oh, it's you.
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Imperatives
and
exclamations

(d) some interjections take different graphemes, e.g.:

嗟/唉 ài	If only ...	嗟/唉，早知如此，我就不去了。 ài zǎo zhī rúcǐ wǒ jiù bù qù le If only I'd known earlier, I wouldn't have gone.
哇/嘿 huò	Wow!	哇/嘿，好大的雪！ huò hǎo dà de xuě Wow, it's snowing like mad

Here is a list of interjections in semantic categories:

(a) calling somebody's attention:

喂 wèi	Hello!	喂，你上哪儿去？ wèi nǐ shàng nǎr qù Hello, where are you off to?
歪 wāi	Hi!	歪，早上好！ wāi zǎoshàng hǎo Hi, good morning.
歪 wāi	Hey!	歪，好久不见了。 wāi hǎojiǔ bù jiàn le Hey, long time no see.
嘿 hēi	Hey!	嘿，快点儿呀！ hēi kuài diǎnr ya Hey, hurry up!
哎 āi	Look out!	哎，小心点儿！ āi xiǎoxīn diǎnr Be careful!
喏 nuò	There!	喏，那不就是你的雨伞？ nuò nà bù jiù shì nǐde yǔsǎn There. Isn't that your umbrella?

(b) responding to a call:

啊 à All right.

唉 āi All right.

嗯 m H'm; I see.

嗯 ng H'm; yes.

嗯 ng OK.

啊，好吧。

à | hǎo ba

OK.

唉，就这样吧。

āi | jiù zhèyàng ba

All right, we'll do it this way.

嗯，我就来。

m | wǒ jiù lái

H'm, I'm coming.

嗯，就这么办。

ng | jiù zhème bàn

Yes, we'll do it like this then.

嗯，行！

ng | xíng

Fine!

(c) expressing doubt or query:

嗯 ng What?

嗯 m Pardon?

啊 á Yes? Well?

哦 ó What?

嗯，你说什么？

ng | nǐ shuō shénme

What, what did you say?

嗯，什么？

m | shénme H'm, what?

啊，你到底去不去呀？

á | nǐ dào dǐ qù bù qù ya

Well, are you going or not?

哦，这是真的吗？

ó | zhè shì zhēnde ma

What, is this true?

(d) expressing sudden revelation:

喔/噢 ō Oh, so it is!

哦 ò Oh (I see.)

喔/噢，我想起来了。

ō | wǒ xiǎng qǐlái le

Oh, I've remembered.

哦，我懂了。

ò | wǒ dǒng le

Oh, I understand.

(e) expressing contradiction:

喂 **ǎi** Come on; No,
no.

欸 **ě** No, no.

喂，不是这样的。

ǎi | bù shì zhèyàng de
Come on, it's not like this.

欸，不能这么说！

ě | bùnéng zhème shuō
No, you can't say that.

(f) expressing surprise:

嘻 **xī** Oh/Gosh!

啊 **ā** What!

嘿 **hēi** Why!

哇 **huō** Wow!

嗨 **hē** Ah!

哟 **yō** Oh!

呀 **yā** Oh!

呦 **yōu** Hey!

嘻，多美呀！

xī | duō měi ya
Oh, how beautiful!

啊，不可能吧？

ā | bù kěnéng ba
What, it isn't possible, is it?

嘿，原来是你！

hēi | yuánlái shì nǐ
Why, it's you!

哇，这么大的西瓜！

huō | zhème dà de xīguā
Wow, such a big watermelon.

嗨，你真行！

hē | nǐ zhēnxíng
Ah, you're really good.

哟，快十二点了。

yō | kuài shí èr diǎn le
Oh, it's nearly 12 o'clock.

呀，下大雨了。

yā | xià dà yǔ le
Oh, it's raining very hard.

呦，怎么你也来了。

yōu | zěnmē nǐ yě lái le
Hey, how come you're here too.

(g) expressing satisfaction:

嘿 **hēi** Hey!

哈 **hā** Aha!

嘿，我们赢了。

hēi | wǒmen yíng le
Hey, we've won.

哈，我猜着了。

hā | wǒ cāizháo le
Aha, I guessed right.

(h) expressing disgust or dissatisfaction:

哼 hng	Humph!	哼, 他撒谎! hng tā sāhuǎng Humph, he's lying!
噃 hm	Humph!	噃, 胡说八道! hm húshuō bā dào Humph, rubbish!
吓 hè	Tut-tut!	吓, 你敢? hè nǐ gǎn Tut-tut, how dare you!
好 hǎo	Well! [sarcastically]	好, 你真有能耐! hǎo nǐ zhēn yǒu néngnài Well, you're really clever.
呸 pēi	Pooh!	呸, 他算老几? pēi tā suàn lǎojiǐ Pooh, he's a nobody.

(i) expressing disappointment:

咦 yí	Hey!	咦, 这是怎么回事? yí zhè shì zěnmé huí shì Hey, what's all this about?
欸 é	Eh? Why?	欸, 她怎么走了? é tā zěnmé zǒu le Eh, why's she gone?
哎 āi	But why?	哎, 为什么不早点说呢? āi wèi shénme bù zǎo diǎn shuō ne But, why didn't you say earlier?

(j) expressing regret:

嗟/唉 ài	Oh [dejected]	嗟/唉, 真可惜! ài zhēn kěxī Oh, what a shame!
咳 hāi	Huh!	咳, 谁知道? hāi shuí zhīdao Huh, who knows?
瞎 hài	Huh!	瞎, 天晓得! hài tiān xiǎode Huh, heaven knows!

Exclamatory expressions, on the other hand, are generally situation specific. The following is a sample list:

(a) for phatic exchanges:

你好!	nǐ hǎo	Hello!
你早!	nǐ zǎo	Morning!
请进!	qǐng jìn	Come in!
慢走!	màn zǒu	Take it easy!
再见!	zàijiàn	Goodbye!
谢谢!	xièxie	Thank you!
不谢!	bù xiè	Don't mention it!
好说, 好说!	hǎo shuō hǎo shuō	You're too kind!
哪里, 哪里!	nǎli nǎli	It's very kind of you to say so.
见笑, 见笑!	jiànxiào jiànxiào	I'm hopeless.

(b) introductory phrases:

对不起	duìbuqǐ	Sorry ...
请问	qǐng wèn	May I ask ...
劳驾	láo jià	Excuse me ...
依我看	yī wǒ kàn	In my view ...
一般来说	yībān lái shuō	Generally speaking ...

(c) angry and abusive:

活该!	huógāi	Serves you right!
滚蛋!	gǔndàn	Scram!
他妈的!	tāmāde	Damn it!
混账!	hùnzhang	Bastard!
岂有此理!	qǐ yǒu cǐ lǐ	Nonsense!

(d) 真 **zhēn** 'really' as an opener:

真糟糕	zhēn zaogāo	What a mess./Too bad.
真该死	zhēn gāisǐ	Damn it.
真要命	zhēn yàomìng	What a nuisance!/ It's terrible
真奇怪	zhēn qíguài	Very odd.

(e) foregrounding a descriptive term with 的 **de** for emphasis:

好端端的, 为什么生起气来了?
hǎoduānduān de | wèishénme shēng qǐ qì lái le
 Everything is fine, and so why are you getting angry?

无缘无故的，你怎么骂起人来了？
wúyuán wú gù de | nǐ zěnmě mà qǐ rén lái le
For no reason at all, why did you start swearing at people?

糊里糊涂的，我把那件事全忘了。
húlihútú de | wǒ bǎ nài jiàn shì quán wàng le
In my confusion, I entirely forgot about that.

(f) 了 *le* voicing an interruption:

好了，好了，别提了。
hǎo le | hǎo le | bié tí le
OK, OK, leave it out.

得了，不要再说了。
dé le | bù yào zài shuō le
Enough, don't say any more.

算了。**suàn le**
That's it. [there's nothing we can do about it]

24.5 Exclamations: particles and degree adverbials or complements

啊 *ā* is the archi-phonemic indicator for most exclamations. Its phonetic and graphemic variants depend on the last vowel or consonant preceding it. The following table gives a rough guide to the possible phonetic and graphetic variations of 啊 *ā*:

endings of the previous word	final phonetic and graphemic realisations
a e i (non-alveolar) o ü	+啊 <i>ā</i> = 呀 <i>yā</i>
u ao ou	+啊 <i>ā</i> = 哇 <i>wā</i>
n	+啊 <i>ā</i> = 哪 <i>nā</i>
(end-of-sentence) le	+啊 <i>ā</i> = 啦 <i>lā</i>
ng i (alveolar)	+啊 <i>ā</i> = 啊 <i>ā</i>

啊 *ā* is normally preceded in the exclamatory sentence or phrase by a degree adverb or complement, such as 多(么) ‘how . . .’, etc. Here are some examples:

这里的风景多美呀！
zhèlǐ de fēngjǐng duō měi ya
How beautiful the scenery is here.

这项工作多么有意义呀！

zhèi xiàng gōngzuò duōme yǒu yìyì ya

This work is really meaningful.

今年夏天的天气真好哇！

jīnnián xiàtiān de tiānqì zhēnhǎo wa

The weather this summer is really good.

我的天哪！**wǒ de tiān na**

Heavens (above)!

什么都安排好啦！**shénme dōu ānpái hǎo la**

Everything is sorted out/settled.

爷爷病啦！**yéye bìng la**

Grandpa's ill!

多棒啊！**duō bàng a**

Wonderful!

屋子里多么安静啊！**wūzi lǐ duōme ānjìng a**

How quiet it is in the room!

我说的都是真人真事啊！**wǒ shuōde dōushì zhēnrén zhēnshì a**

I'm talking about real people and events.

啊 ā is a direct and instinctive exclamation. However, if the exclamation is a response³ intended to contradict an apparent assumption, other exclamatory particles are used, of which each has specific implications.

³ Corresponding to the responsive type in imperatives.

呢 *ne* asserts what is truly the case and not what others might have imagined it to be. It features in complaints, contradictions and rejections of criticism and it is often used with adverbs such as 才 *cái* 'only then...', 正在 *zhèngzài* 'right at this moment' and 怎么 *zěnmē* 'how can...'.
英国队不赢才怪呢！
yīngguóduì bù yíng cáiguài ne
It will be odd if the English team does not win.
大家正在想念你呢！
dàjiā zhèngzài xiǎngniàn nǐ ne
Everyone's missing you.
你怎么能这样说呢！
nǐ zěnmē néng zhèyàng shuō ne
How could you say that?

嘛 **ma** is also used to retort in a mild way to what seems to be an unreasonable suggestion:

这不是很清楚嘛!

zhè bù shì hěn qīngchū ma

Isn't this very clear?

这件事不能怪他。他还小嘛!

zhèi jiàn shì bùnéng guài tā | tā hái xiǎo ma

You can't blame him for this. He's still young/only a child.

喽 **lōu**, a variant of 了 **le**, conveys a degree of urgency about something that has to be done or is about to happen:

比赛开始喽! **bǐsài kāishǐ lōu**

The match is about to begin. [please settle down and watch!]

吃饭喽! **chī fàn lōu**

The dinner is ready! [please take your seat at the table!]

Abbreviations and omissions

A highly significant feature of Chinese sentence and discourse structure is the avoidance of repetition wherever possible. Sentences are abbreviated and words omitted where context and co-text make the meaning clear. Pronouns in particular are regularly omitted and the third person neuter ‘它 *tā* ‘it’ occurs quite rarely, since it is by definition a reference back to something already identified. Questions with their answers give clear examples of this feature.

25.1 Abbreviations in answers to questions

In answers to questions, only essential information is given, and the response to yes–no questions almost invariably focuses on the verb as the core element. In the examples below, we give literal translations to indicate the structure of the responses. There are standard translations in brackets.

- question: 你去看电影吗? **nǐ qù kàn diànyǐng ma**
You go see film **ma**? (Are you going to the cinema/to see a film?)
- answer: 去啊。 **qù ā**
Go *a*. (Yes.)
- question: 那本书你看完了吗? **nèi běn shū nǐ kàn wán le ma**
That *mw* book you read finish **le ma**?
(Have you finished reading that book?)
- answer: 还没有。 **hái méiyǒu**
Still not have. (Not yet.)
- question: 你喜欢这幅画儿吗? **nǐ xǐhuan zhèi fú huàr ma?**
You like this *mw* picture **ma**? (Do you like this picture?)
- answer: 我喜欢, 可是我妻子不喜欢。
wǒ xǐhuan | kèshì wǒ qīzi bù xǐhuan
I like, but my wife not like. (I do but my wife doesn't.)

Even in answers to question-word questions where the focus is elsewhere, verbs still tend to be repeated:

- question: 谁去帮帮他的忙?
shuí qù bāngbāng tāde máng
Who go help-help his busy? (Who is going to help him?)
- answer: 我去
wǒ qù
I go. (I am.)
- question: 什么时候去?
¹**shénme shíhou qù**
What time go? (When are you going?)
- answer: 明天去。
míngtiān qù
Tomorrow go. (Tomorrow.)

Note that in the last question, while ‘you’ is required in the English translation, the Chinese has no need for the pronoun since it is clear that it must be the person addressed.²

¹ Note that the subject 你 *nǐ* ‘you’ is omitted in this follow-up question but the verb is retained.

² See §25.5 below.

25.2 Abbreviations in face-to-face exchanges

The omission of ‘you’ mentioned immediately above is naturally a feature of orders or requests made face to face, since the addressee is in the same way normally obvious:

- 请进! **qǐng jìn**
Please come in.
- 快把东西收拾好!
kuài bǎ dōngxi shōushi hǎo
Hurry up and make things tidy.

Other conventional face-to-face expressions are likewise succinct, without subjects or objects being mentioned:

- | | | |
|------|-------------------|--|
| 对不起。 | duibuqǐ | Sorry. (lit. Face-not-rise.) |
| 谢谢。 | xièxie | Thanks./Thank you. (lit. Thank-thank.) |
| 没关系。 | méi guānxi | It doesn’t matter. (lit. Has not concern.) |

25.3 Abbreviations in comparisons

In Chinese syntax, it is the norm for the second element in a comparison not to be expressed in full. For example, in the following sentences, the words in square brackets would usually be omitted:

那件衣服比这件[衣服]漂亮。

nèi jiàn yīfu bǐ zhèi jiàn [yīfu] piàoliang

(lit. that mw clothes cv:compared with this mw [clothes] attractive)

That suit/piece of clothing is prettier/more attractive than this one.

你打羽毛球打得比我[打羽毛球打得]好。

nǐ dǎ yǔmáoqiú dǎ de bǐ wǒ [dǎ yǔmáoqiú dǎ de] hǎo

(lit. you play badminton play **de** cv:compared with me [play badminton play **de**] well)

You play badminton better than I do.

这儿的天气比北京[的天气]热。

zhèr de tiānqì bǐ běijīng [de tiānqì] rè

(lit. here **de** weather cv:compared with beijing [**de** weather] hot)

The weather here is hotter than in Beijing.

25.4 The hidden presence of the narrator in a narrative

The narrator in a piece of narration is omnipresent but not always visible. In Chinese, there is a range of set expressions that establish a narrative presentation, introducing the description of a situation or creating an atmosphere. They usually take the form of an impersonalised verbal phrase and are placed at the beginning of the sentence:

只见远远走来两个人。

zhǐ jiàn yuǎnyuǎn zǒu lái liǎng ge rén

(lit. only see far-far walk-come two mw people)

One could see that in the distance two people approached.

据说他已出国去了。

jùshuō tā yǐ chūguó qù le

(lit. according to talk he already exit country go **le**)

They say he's already gone abroad.

不知不觉已经过了一年。

bùzhī bùjué yǐjīng guò le yī nián

(lit. not know not feel already pass **le** one year)

Imperceptibly, a year had already passed.

谁知道那年冬天没有下雪。

shuí/shéi zhīdao nèi nián dōngtiān méiyǒu xià xuě

(lit. who know that year winter not have fall snow)

Nobody expected it not to snow that winter./Unexpectedly it did not snow that winter.

怪不得她生气了。

guàibude tā shēngqì le

(lit. wonder not possible she angry *le*)

No wonder she got angry.

25.5 Omissions in a discourse

The omission of sentence elements we observed in §25.1 is most apparent in longer sentences in Chinese. They usually take the form of chain constructions³ that bring together, in a linear sequence of time and action, a series of basic ‘subject + predicate’ or ‘topic + comment’ sentences. They also establish, by definition, a broader contextual and co-textual base, which allows for extensive omissions of elements like subjects and objects from the constituent basic sentences, because these elements have already been identified in the text.

³ See Chapter 14.

Take a sentence like the following (arranged vertically to identify the constituent sentences):

那天我去找一个老朋友，**nèi tiān wǒ qù zhǎo yī ge lǎo péngyou**

敲了两下门，**qiāo le liǎng xià mén**

没人回答，**méi rén huídá**

想他准是出去了，**xiǎng tā zhǔn shì chū qù le**

便留了个字条，**biàn liú le ge zìtiáo**

从门上的信箱口里塞了进去，**cóng mén shàng de xìnxiāngkǒu lǐ sāi le jìnqu**

约好改日再去拜访，**yuē hǎo gǎirì zài qù bài fǎng**

并说回来后，**bìng shuō huí lái hòu**

最好给我一个答复，**zuìhǎo gěi wǒ yī ge dá fù**

没想到过了几天，**méi xiǎng dào guò le jǐ tiān**

收到一封没署名的信，**shōudào yī fēng méi shǔmíng de xìn**

说他已经搬走了，**shuō tā yǐjīng bān zǒu le**

不知去了什么地方。**bùzhī qù le shénme dìfang**

To highlight the omissions, we will first provide a literal translation and then a full translation, which introduces in brackets the pronominal and other elements required by English but 'omitted' by Chinese:

literal translation:

那天我去找一个老朋友，	that day I go find one mw old friend
敲了两下门，	knock le two mw:times door
没人回答，	no people reply
想他准是出去了，	think he definitely exit-go le
便留了个字条，	then leave le mw note
从门上的信箱口里塞了进去，	cv:from door-on de letter box opening inside push le enter-go
约好改日再去拜访，	fix another day again go visit
并说回来后，	and say return-come after
最好给我一个答复，	best give me one mw reply
没想到过了几天，	not expect pass le few days
收到一封没署名的信，	receive one mw not sign de letter
说他已经搬走了，	say he already move out le
不知去了什么地方。	not know go le what place

full translation:

那天我去找一个老朋友，	That day I went to see an old friend.
敲了两下门，	(I) knocked on the door,
没人回答，	(but) nobody answered.
想他准是出去了，	(I) thought that he must have gone out,
便留了个字条，	(and) so (I) left a note
从门上的信箱口里塞了进去，	(and) pushed (it) through the letter box in the door,
约好改日再去拜访，	indicating that (I) would come back another day.
并说回来后，	(I) also said that as soon as (he) comes back,
最好给我一个答复，	it would be nice if (he) could drop me a note.
没想到过了几天，	(I) never expected that a few days later
收到一封没署名的信，	(I) would receive an anonymous letter
说他已经搬走了，	saying that he had already moved out
不知去了什么地方。	(and) (it) was not known where (he) had moved to.

This sentence, centred around the single theme of a fruitless visit, consists of thirteen constituent sentences, simply strung together following an

inherent time sequence. There are few linking words and the sentence is a mini-discourse, which holds its shape through the rhythm of the sequentially juxtaposed constituent sentences. Pronouns are generally redundant and are not present since the noun subjects or objects they would represent are clearly identifiable from the context.

Below are a few more examples for illustration.

我养了一只猫，可是不会抓老鼠，妹妹说，算了，不要养了，
送给别人吧。

**wǒ yǎng le yī zhī māo | kěshì bùhuì zhuā lǎoshǔ | mèimei
shuō | suàn le | bù yào yǎng le | sòng gěi biérén ba**

(lit. I rear **le** one mw cat, but not can catch mice, younger sister said,
that's enough, don't keep **le**, send-give others **ba**)

I had a cat, but (it) could not catch mice. Younger sister said, 'That's
enough. Don't keep (it) any more. Give (it) to someone else'.

体育锻炼可以增强体质，早上起来跑跑步，使你整天精神饱满，
有什么不好呢？

**tǐyù duànliàn kěyǐ zēngqiáng tǐzhì | zǎoshàng qǐlái pǎopǎo bù |
shǐ nǐ zhěngtiān jīngshén bǎomǎn | yǒu shénme bù hǎo ne**

(lit. physical training can strengthen constitution, morning get up jog
steps, makes you whole day spirit full, has what not good **ne**)

Physical education can strengthen (the) constitution. Getting up in the
morning for a run can make you full of vigour all day, (and) what is
wrong (with that)?

时间很宽裕，可以从从容容地做。

shíjiān hěn kuānyù | kěyǐ cóngcóngróng de zuò

(lit. time very ample, can leisurely **de** do)

There's plenty of time (you) can do (it) without any rush.

听他的口音，好象是浙江人。

tīng tāde kǒuyīn | hǎoxiàng shì zhèjiāng rén

(lit. listen to his accent, seems to be Zhejiang person)

From his accent, (he) sounds like someone from Zhejiang.

我常常到那儿去买龙虾，有时有，有时没有。

**wǒ chángcháng dào nàr qù mǎi lóngxiā | yǒu shí yǒu |
yǒu shí méiyǒu**

(lit. I often get there go buy lobster, sometimes have, sometimes not have)

I often go there to buy lobsters, sometimes (they) have (some) and
sometimes (they) don't.

Prosody and syntax

In this chapter, we shall see that the acceptability of a sentence in Modern Standard Chinese is dictated not only by the language's syntactic rules but also by its prosodic canons.

By a sentence in this context, we mean a colloquial and prosaic utterance employed in everyday speech and writing, and our discussions will focus on how the language's prosody tends to interfere with the actual formulations of such an utterance.

As for the prosodic principles that guide the more artistic forms of language used in classical Chinese poetry, opera, and so on, we shall mention them here only in brief.

26.1 Setting the scene: an experiment with 一 *yī* used similarly to an indefinite article in English

We know that 一 *yī* may either be used as a numeral meaning 'one', where it is stressed, or it may adopt the function of indefinite reference similar to an indefinite article *a/an* in English, where it is unstressed. In the latter case, we also know, this unstressed 一 *yī* in a sentence may be omitted without making any difference to the actual meaning intended, e.g.

我送了一支笔给她。 **wǒ sòng le yī zhī bǐ gěi tā**

我送了支笔给她。 **wǒ sòng le zhī bǐ gěi tā**

'I gave a pen to her'

However, if we replace the verb 送 *sòng* 'to give' with its disyllabic equivalent 赠送 *zèngsòng* 'to give (as a present)', we see that the second alternative with 一 *yī* 'a/an' dropped is no longer valid:

我赠送了一支笔给她。 **wǒ zèngsòng le yī zhī bǐ gěi tā**

*我赠送了支笔给她。 **wǒ zèngsòng le zhī bǐ gěi tā**

'I gave her (the present of) a pen'

Again, if we keep the verb 送 *sòng* in its monosyllabic form and move the coverbial phrase 给她 *gěi tā* ‘to her’ (which indicates the indirect object) forward to a position behind the verb, the second version becomes invalid:

我送给了她一支笔。 *wǒ sòng gěi le tā yī zhī bǐ*

*我送给了她支笔。 *wǒ sòng gěi le tā zhī bǐ*

In like manner, we could also say:

我来敬杯酒！ *wǒ lái jìng bēi jiǔ*

‘I propose a toast!’

where 来 *lái* ‘to come’ has its colloquial function of indicating the willingness on the part of the speaker in offering to do something and is used here in conjunction with the main (monosyllabic) verb of the utterance 敬 *jìng* ‘to respectfully propose’.

Nevertheless, if we insert an indirect object into the structure after the verb, we once again invalidate the abbreviated version and are obliged to reinstate the dropped 一 *yī*:

*我来敬大家杯酒！ *wǒ lái jìng dàjiā bēi jiǔ*

我来敬大家一杯酒！ *wǒ lái jìng dàjiā yī bēi jiǔ*

‘Let me toast everyone present’

We’ll now look at a similar, but slightly different, construction:

咱们去喝杯酒！ *zánmen qù hē bēi jiǔ*

‘Let’s go and have a drink!’

where 去 *qù* ‘to go’, like 来 *lái* ‘to come’ in the previous example, is used in conjunction with another verb that follows to indicate a suggestion made by the speaker that they go somewhere to do something. Northern speakers regularly leave 去 *qù* ‘to go’ till the end of the utterance, but that does not affect the overall meaning of the sentence:

咱们喝杯酒去！ *zánmen hē bēi jiǔ qù*

‘Let’s go and have a drink!’

Or, to make the suggestion sound more tentative, the particle 吧 *ba* may be added at the end:

咱们去喝酒吧！ *zánmen qù hē bēi jiǔ ba*

‘Let’s go and have a drink then!’

These syntactic variations do not make any difference to the general tenet or validity of the proposition. However, if a particle or another element

is introduced after the verb to modify or supplement it, the sequence of the sentence is once again upset and it can be validated only by the reinstatement of 一 yī:

*咱们去喝它杯酒吧! **zánmen qù hē tā bēi jiǔ ba**

*咱们去喝那么杯酒吧! **zánmen qù hē nàme bēi jiǔ ba**

咱们去喝它一杯酒吧!

zánmen qù hē tā yī bēi jiǔ ba

'Come on, let's go and have a drink!'

咱们去喝那么一杯酒吧!

zánmen qù hē nàme yī bēi jiǔ ba¹

'Let's therefore go and have a drink'

¹ The two words 它 tā 'lit. it' and 那么 nàme 'lit. like that' are not used here in their normal capacities as a pronoun and a degree adverb. They rather function as two post-verbal particles in the context of a speaker making suggestions: the former indicates a 'relaxed' tone, while the latter is more 'restrained'. They therefore form part of the verb phrase rather than the following noun phrase.

The important factor here is, of course, the relationship between the direct object and the verb that governs it, and we will examine the reasons for this in the following sections.

On the face of it, it would appear that the following sentences are equally acceptable, irrespective of whether the direct object is disyllabic, trisyllabic, or quadrisyllabic, whether the verb is disyllabic or otherwise, and whether the indefinite-referenced 一 yī is present or not:

我(赠)送了(一)支毛笔给她。

wǒ zèngsòng le zhī máobǐ gěi tā

'I gave her a writing brush (as a present)'

我(赠)送了(一)个小提琴给她。

wǒ zèngsòng le gè xiǎotíqín gěi tā

'I gave her a violin (as a present)'

我(赠)送了(一)个手提电话给她。

wǒ zèngsòng le gè shǒutí diànhuà gěi tā

'I gave her a mobile phone (as a present)'

However this is not always the case, and in the next section, we shall detail the linguistic principles that are at work to validate one construction and invalidate another, where syntactic rules do not seem to have been violated.

26.2 End weight: the balance between the verb and its direct object

By ‘end weight’ we mean the length the closing section of an utterance must have in the balance of the sentence as prescribed by the prosody of the language. This does not mean that the predicate or rheme of a sentence must be lengthier than its subject or theme. In Chinese, this ‘end weight’ principle (where new rather than old information usually resides) seems to obtain within the predicate or rheme itself, i.e. between the verb and its direct object.

26.2.1 The direct object as the end weight

If we compare the following two sentences:

- (a) 我写了一封信。
wǒ xiě le yī fēng xìn

or

我写了封信²。
wǒ xiě le fēng xìn
‘I wrote a letter’

- (b) 我口授了一封信。
wǒ kǒushòu le yī fēng xìn
‘I dictated a letter’

but not:

*我口授了封信。
wǒ kǒushòu le fēng xìn

² We have already pointed out in 6.8.1 that a structure like 我写了信 **wǒ xiě le xìn** is incomplete, and must be followed by a further expression to complete the sentence.

In the predicate of the first utterance (a), the verb is monosyllabic and its direct object is also monosyllabic and is preceded by an optional indefinite-referenced — **yī** ‘a/an’. In both cases the direct object outweighs its monosyllabic governing verb. In the predicate of the second sentence (b), the verb becomes disyllabic while its direct object remains monosyllabic and is preceded by the same indefinite-referenced — **yī** ‘a/an’. However, the presence of — **yī** is obligatory, since, if it is omitted, the utterance becomes unbalanced.

The optional or obligatory inclusion of an indefinite-referenced — *yī* ‘a/an’ in a nominal or nominalized³ direct object as illustrated by the examples below will provide an insight into one of the major prosodic rules in Chinese.

³ A pronominal direct object is not dictated by this prosodic principle. Unlike nominal, adjectival, or verbal direct objects that represent new information, pronominals, being essentially monosyllabic themselves and representing only given information, can often be left unstressed, enabling a disyllabic verb to assume end weight itself, e.g. 你打了他。 *nǐ dǎ le tā* ‘you’ve hit him’, 你得罪了他。 *nǐ dézuì le tā* ‘you’ve offended him.’

Chinese verbs are either monosyllabic or disyllabic. A monosyllabic verb may govern a direct object of any number of syllables, but a disyllabic verb must govern a direct object of at least two syllables, and, if the direct object is monosyllabic, a closely-associated numeral or the indefinite-referenced — *yī* ‘a/an’ followed by a measure word must be included:

喝酒 *hējiǔ* ‘to drink (wine)’

喝啤酒 *hē pǐjiǔ* ‘to drink beer’

喝葡萄酒 *hē pútāojiǔ* ‘to drink wine’

喝了一瓶酒 *hē le yī píng jiǔ* ‘drank a bottle of wine’

喝了瓶酒 *hē le píng jiǔ* ‘drank a bottle of wine’

喝了一大瓶酒 *hē le yī dà píng jiǔ* ‘drank a large bottle of wine’

喝了满满的一杯酒 *hē le mǎnmǎn de yī bēi jiǔ* ‘drank (down)
a full glass of wine’

写信 *xiěshū* ‘to write (a letter)’

*改写书 *gǎixiě shū*

改写一本书 *gǎixiě yī běn shū* ‘to rewrite a book’

*改写本书⁴ *gǎixiě běn shū*

改写其中的章节 *gǎixiě qízhòng de zhāngjié* ‘to rewrite chapters
in it’

改写其中的一部分章节 *gǎixiě qízhòng de yī bùfēn zhāngjié*
‘to rewrite some of the chapters in it’

改写其中一部分的章节 *gǎixiě qízhòng yī bùfēn de zhāngjié*
‘to rewrite some of the chapters in it’

⁴ In this invalid sentence 本 *běn* is used as a measure word for books, not as the rather literary adjective meaning ‘this’. Otherwise 改写本书 could mean ‘to rewrite this book.’

It can be seen that the ‘end weight’ principle in Chinese prosody indicates that whilst a monosyllabic verb may take a direct object of any syllabic

length, a disyllabic verb must take at least a disyllabic object. If not, the object in question must be compensated in syllable length by other syntactic means which come into direct association with it in the sentence.

However this principle applies only to direct objects that carry new information and are normally stressed to render weight to the utterance. Pronominal items, which usually convey repeated or existing information, can often become unaccented, thus giving free rein to the disyllabic verbs that govern them to take on ‘end weight’ themselves. (See Note 2.)

Here are some more examples to illustrate this last point. It can be seen that all these sentences are acceptable whether the verbs used are monosyllabic or disyllabic, despite the fact that the pronominal direct objects they govern are all monosyllables:

找他 **zhǎo tā** ‘to look for him’
 去找他 **qù zhǎo tā** ‘to go to look for him’
 拜访他 **bàifǎng tā** ‘to visit him’
 去拜访他 **qù bàifǎng tā** ‘to go to visit him’
 你找谁? **nǐ zhǎo shéi** ‘who are you looking for?’
 你邀请了谁? **nǐ yāoqǐng le shéi** ‘who did you invite?’
 我没邀请她。 **wǒ méi yāoqǐng tā** ‘I did not invite her’
 你等人⁵吗? **nǐ děng rén ma** ‘Are you waiting for someone?’
 你别吓唬人! **nǐ bié xiǎhu rén** ‘Don’t frighten me/people!’
 不要冤枉人! **bù yào yuānwang rén** ‘Don’t be unfair to me/people!’

⁵ 人 **rén** is used here as a pronoun to mean either ‘someone including the speaker’ or ‘someone else, other people’ with reference to the given context.

Before we leave this section, we must hasten to add that a disyllabic verb, particularly with an internal VC structure (See the chapter on Morphology and Syntax (I)) may take on a bare (i.e. unmodified) monosyllabic direct object without invalidating the whole construction, but the sentence is nevertheless incomplete and must have a follow-up clause to complete it. For example,

他喝醉了酒, ... **tā hē zuì le jiǔ** ...
 他吃完了饭, ... **tā chī wán le fàn** ...

26.2.2 *The verb itself carries the end weight*

In the earlier chapters and sections discussing the 把 **bǎ** and 被 **bèi** constructions, we have seen that syntax stipulates that verbs coming at

the end of the sentence cannot be left unmarked particularly if they are monosyllabic.

We know that the coverb 把 *bǎ* moves the original post-verb direct object to a pre-verbal position as its own object. This syntactic operation may sometimes cause a change of reference in the original object from indefinite to definite reference. What is important to note here is that the verb without its original object is now left at the end of the sentence to carry the end weight. There is no problem if the verb is disyllabic or has an inherent meaning indicating direction or result; nor is there any difficulty if the verb has some form of complement. However, if the verb is monosyllabic, the sentence then immediately becomes invalid. The underlying prosodic principles of the language are essentially at work here. Take the following example:

她在晾衣服。

tā zài liàng yīfu

'She is hanging out the washing to dry'

Here the 把 *bǎ* cannot be introduced without reformulating the sentence

*她在把衣服晾。

tā zài bǎ yīfu liàng

她在把衣服晾出去。

tā zài bǎ yīfu liàng chūqu

'She is hanging out the clothes'

她在把衣服晾起来。

tā zài bǎ yīfu liàng qǐlai

'She is hanging up the clothes'

她在把衣服晾在晾衣绳上。

tā zài bǎ yīfu liàng zài liàngyīshéng shàng

'She is hanging the clothes on the washing line'

The same applies with the 被 *bèi* construction, which shifts the original object to a pre-verb position to become the grammatical subject of the sentence, and, as with 把 *bǎ*, leaves the verb at the end of the sentence:

父亲骂孩子。 **fùqīn mà háizi**

'Father scolds the child'

*孩子被父亲骂。 **háizi bèi fùqīn mà**

孩子被父亲骂了。 **háizi bèi fùqīn mà le**

'The child was scolded by (its) father'

孩子被父亲骂了一顿。

háizi bèi fùqīn mà le yī dùn

'The child was given a telling-off by (its) father'

孩子被父亲骂得哭了起来。

háizi bèi fùqīn mà de kū le qǐlai

'The child was told off by (its) father and began to cry'

26.2.3 Intransitive verbs at the end of sentences

Monosyllabic intransitive verbs follow the pattern we have seen above and also cannot stand alone at the end of a sentence. In the following examples, where monosyllabic intransitive verbs are the main predicate, it can be seen that they all form *le*-expository sentences with 了 *le* added to the verb. This not only indicates a newly-emerged situation, but also gives added weight to the original monosyllabic intransitives, thereby making utterances valid:

婴儿死了。 **yīng'ér sǐ le**

'The baby has died.'

花儿谢了。 **huār xiè le**

'The flowers have withered.'

花生皮了。 **huāshēng pí le**

'The peanuts are soggy/are not crisp any more.'

Questions, imperatives and exclamations, on the other hand, unlike declarative sentences, have linked particles which add balance to the monosyllabic verbs at the end of a sentence:

你去吗? **nǐ qù ma** 'Are you going?'

谁去呢? **shéi qù ne** 'Who is going then?'

咱们走吧。 **zánmen zǒu ba** 'Let's go'

真美呀! **zhēn měi ya** 'Really beautiful'

Exceptionally, in emphatic utterances, expressing urgency, strong emotion etc, monosyllabic verbal (or adjectival) endings do occur:

谁去? **shéi qù** 'Come on. Who is going?'

咱们走。 **zánmen zǒu** '(Never mind about him.) Do let's go!'

真美! **zhēn měi** 'How beautiful!'

26.2.4 Conclusion

The examples we have given of the indefinite-referenced — *yī* ‘a/an’ not only indicate the prosodic requirements of verbs and their nominal or nominalized direct objects, but they also, as we shall see, point to the underlying prosodic principle of the language: its disyllabic rhythmic tendencies. The proposition we have suggested regarding end weight etc can be duly verified against these intrinsic prosodic principles of the language.

26.3 The disyllabic rhythmic pattern of Chinese speech

Owing to the disyllabic dominance of the lexical items in the language’s vocabulary, Chinese has gradually developed a preference for disyllabic rhythms. By disyllabic rhythm we mean a rhythmic pattern of a strong beat followed by a weak beat. In fact, the Tang poetry of medieval China was based on **disyllabic trochaic rhythms**:

Xx Xx X⁶

王之涣登鹳雀楼

Wáng Zhīhuàn Dēng Guànnquè Lóu

Climbing Crane Pagoda

白日 依山 尽,	bái rì yī shān jìn white sun lean on mountain ends
黄河 入海 流。	huáng hé rù hǎi liú yellow river enter sea flows
欲穷 千里 目,	yù qióng qiān lǐ mù desire exhaust thousand <i>li</i> eyes
更上 一层 楼。	gèng shàng yī céng lóu further mount one level building

The white sun sinks behind the mountains,
The Yellow River flows into the sea.
Desiring to extend my gaze over a thousand *li*
I climb another floor of the pagoda.

⁶ Upper-case X is used to indicate stress, whereas lower-case x indicates non-stress. Syllables in non-stress beats do not necessarily lose their inherent tones.

Xx Xx Xx X

张继枫桥夜泊

Zhāng Jì Fēng Qiáo Yè Bó

Mooring at Night by Maple Bridge

月落 | 乌啼 | 霜满 | 天 **yuè luò | wū tí | shuāng mǎn | tiān**
江枫 | 渔火 | 对愁 | 眠。 **jiāng fēng | yú huǒ | duì chóu | mián**
姑苏 | 城外 | 寒山 | 寺, **gū sū | chéng wài | hán shān | sì**
夜半 | 钟声 | 到客 | 船。 **yè bàn | zhōng shēng | dào kè | chuán**

moon fall | crows call | frost fill | sky
river maples | fishing light | cv:facing sadly | sleep
Suzhou | walls outside | Hanshan | monastery
night middle | bell sound | arrive traveller | boat

The moon sinks, the crows call and frost fills the sky,
By the river maples, the fishing boat lights confront my troubled sleep.
Beyond the walls of Suzhou, the Hanshan monastery
In the middle of the night the sound of its bell reaches the traveller's boat.

What we have seen here is that (a) two characters represented by two monosyllables represent a disyllabic rhythmic unit in a continuous line of poetry; (b) this disyllabic rhythm may cut across word (or lexemic) boundaries as in 寒山 | 寺 **hán shān | sì** 'Hanshan monastery' (where a trisyllabic lexemic unit has been separated into two rhythmic units) and 到客 | 船 **dào kè | chuán** 'to reach the traveller's boat' (where a monosyllabic verb allies with the first part of a disyllabic lexeme to form a disyllabic rhythmic unit and the second part of the disyllabic lexeme stands on its own.)

26.3.1 The disyllabic rhythmic difference between poetry and prose

The strict disyllabic rules of Tang poetry do not of course wholly reflect or represent present-day Chinese speech or writing. However, this basic disyllabic rhythm is carried over into modern speech and prose. The salient difference between a Tang poetic line and modern prose is that the disyllabic rhythm of the latter, to use musical terminology, can allow when necessary a 'passing note' or 'flourish'⁷, the choice of which depends on immediate syntactic correlations, e.g.

⁷ The terms 'passing note' and 'flourish' are borrowed from musical composition. By a passing note here we mean a syllable that comes at the end of a 'strong and weak beat' unit/bar and is said quickly before the onset of the next unit/bar; and by a flourish we mean a syllable that is said quickly at the beginning of a 'strong and weak beat' unit/bar.

Xx^{*} (a disyllabic rhythm with a passing note)

美丽的 **mèilì de** 'beautiful'
 悄悄地 **qiāoqiāo de** 'quietly'
 打扮得 **dǎbàn de** 'dress as, pose as'
 完成了 **wánchéng le** 'completed'
 经历过 **jīnglì guo** 'experienced'

***Xx** (a disyllabic rhythm with a flourish)

把东西 **bǎ dōngxi** 'grasp/hold something'
 被顾客 **bèi gùkè** 'by a customer'
 用力气 **yòng lìqì** 'with effort'
 一来到 **yī láidào** 'on arrival'
 就拿出 **jiù ná chū** 'then take out'

The next section will systematically list those lexical items that occur in strong beats, those that serve as weak beats, passing notes, or flourishes, and those that may function either as strong or weak beats depending on adjacent items.

26.3.2 *Different words in the vocabulary play different roles in the disyllabic rhythmic structure*

It is perhaps universally true that content words are usually stressed and form words unstressed. This is certainly the case with Chinese. The only difference is that all disyllabic words in Chinese, whether they are content words or form words, invariably form a disyllabic rhythmic unit, whereas monosyllabic content words usually have strong beats (i.e. the first stressed part of a disyllabic rhythmic unit) and monosyllabic form words are either weak beats (i.e. the second unstressed part of a disyllabic rhythmic unit) or passing notes or flourishes.

The following three lists provide some idea of what kinds of word play what kinds of role in the disyllabic rhythmic structure.

Disyllabic words across all grammatical categories (whether they are content words or form words) are the natural components of a disyllabic rhythmic unit. The first syllable of the unit is always the strong beat, whereas the second, the weak beat. While the strong beat syllable always keeps its

specific tone, the weak beat syllable may sometimes lose its tone as, for example, in the case of 喜欢 **xǐhuan** 'to like' or 愿意 **yuànyì** 'willing':

disyllabic noun	杯子 bēizi cup/glass	酒杯 jiǔbēi wine glass
disyllabic verb	学习 xuéxí to study	喜欢 xǐhuan to like
disyllabic adjective	美丽 měili beautiful	残酷 cánkù cruel
disyllabic modal verb	可以 kěyǐ may	愿意 yuànyì willing
disyllabic adverb	已经 yǐjīng already	常常 chángcháng often
disyllabic conjunction	如果 rúguǒ if	虽然 suīrán (al)though
numeral above ten	二十 èrshí twenty	三百 sān bǎi three hundred
negator	没有 méiyǒu (did/have) not	

On the other hand, the following monosyllabic grammatical categories either occur in the weak beats or serve as passing notes or flourishes:

adjectival particle	的 de		
adverbial particle	地 de		
complemental particle	得 de		
sentence particle	了 le		
functional particle	把 bǎ	被 bèi	
aspect indicator	了 le	过 guo	在 zài
potential complement filler	得 de	不 bu	

Monosyllabic content words may either feature as strong beats or weak beats (or as passing notes or flourishes as is often the case with coverbs and reference adverbs) depending on emphasis required and also on their position in the utterance in relation to the nature of their adjacent syllables:

monosyllabic pronoun	我 wǒ I	你 nǐ you	他 tā he
monosyllabic verb	去 qù to go	是 shì to be	有 yǒu to have
monosyllabic adverb	再 zài again	又 yòu again	很 hěn very
monosyllabic modal verb	能 néng can	要 yào want	肯 kěn willing

monosyllabic conjunction	如 rú if	和 hé and	跟 gēn with/and
reference adverb	都 dōu all/both	也 yě also	就 jiù then
monosyllabic coverb	在 zài in, at, etc	用 yòng with	
monosyllabic demonstratives	这 zhè this	那 nà that	
monosyllabic postposition	上 shàng on	中 zhōng in	下 xià under
measure word	个 ge	杯 bēi	本 běn
indefinite-referenced 'a/an'	一 yī		

26.3.3 *How disyllabic and monosyllabic content and form words intertwine to form a disyllabic rhythmic unit*

The length of a sentence or a piece of language between plausible pauses may of course vary, but in each disyllabic unit of language the strong and weak alternation of beats remains the basic feature. The speaker may choose to pause where sense groups allow and interpose strong beats with a maximal of one weak beat and one passing note or flourish as shown above.

A strong beat may also miss out a following weak beat either because of a monosyllabic noun at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence followed immediately by a disyllabic word or rhythm, e.g.

天 | 已经 | 亮了。 **tiān yǐjīng liàng le** 'It (the sky) is already light'
X 0 | X x | X x

不久 | 风 | 停了。 **bùjiǔ fēng tíng le** 'Soon the wind dropped'
X x | X 0 | X x

or when a monosyllabic syllable precedes a pause, e.g.

他下了 | 班 | 马上 | 就走了。 **tā xià le bān mǎshàng jiù zǒu le**
'He left immediately he finished class'
***X x | X 0 | X x | *X x**

The interposing of passing notes, flourishes, or missing weak beats at different places in a sentence breaks the monotony of a repetitive disyllabic rhythm.

In the above, 0 represents a plausible pause in speech, which may be short or long. Pauses we know are usually used to punctuate feasible sense groups. In the Chinese context, they may, when necessary, occur between S and V

(e.g. when S is monosyllabic), between V and O (e.g. when the latter is lengthy), between Ad and V (when Ad is more akin to S), but rarely between A and N or between V and C.

We shall now quote and analyze some concrete examples to see how all this works out.

夜已经很静了，凉飕飕的小风，一股儿一股儿地从支开的窗子上吹进来。那风，带着露水的潮气，也带着麦熟的香味儿，吹在庄稼人的心坎上，比含着一块冰糖还甜呀！(浩然：《艳阳天》)

yè yǐjīng hěn jìng le | liángsōusōu de xiǎofēng | yī gǔr yī gǔr de cóng zhīkāi de chuāngzi shàng chuī jìnlai || nà fēng | dài zhe lùshuǐ de cháoqì | yé dài zhe mài shú de xiāngwèir | chuī zài zhuāngjiārén de xīnkǎn shàng | bǐ hán zhe yī kuài bīngtáng hái tián ya ||

夜 | 已经 | 很静了 | 凉飕 | 飕的 | 小风 | 一股儿 | 一股儿地 | 从支开的 | 窗子上 | 吹进 | 来 | 那风 | 带着 | 露水的 | 潮气 | 也带着 | 麦熟的 | 香味儿 | 吹在 | 庄稼 | 人的 | 心坎 | 上 | 比含着 | 一块 | 冰糖 | 还甜呀！(浩然：《艳阳天》)

yè 0 | yǐjīng | hěn jìng le | liángsōu | sōu de | xiǎofēng | yī gǔr | yī gǔr de | cóng zhī kāi de | chuāngzi shàng | chuī jìn | lái 0 || nà fēng | dài zhe | lùshuǐ de | cháoqì | yé dài zhe | mài shú de | xiāngwèir | chuī zài | zhuāngjiā | rén de | xīnkǎn | shàng 0 | bǐ hán zhe | yī kuài | bīngtáng | hái tián ya ||

(lit.) night already very quiet le, chilly de breeze, one-gust-one-gust de through prop-open de window-on blow-come-in. That wind, carry zhe dew de moisture, also carry zhe wheat-ripe de scent, blow on peasants de heart-bottom-on, compare with mouth-hold zhe one-piece crystal sugar still sweet ya.

'The night was already quiet and the chilly gusts of the wind blew in through the open window. The wind, carrying the moisture of the dew and the scent of ripening wheat, blew into the peasants' hearts, sweeter than (a piece of) crystal sugar in one's mouth.'

(Hao Ran, 'Bright Skies')

We can see here that coverbs (e.g. 从 cóng 'from', 比 bǐ 'compared with, than'), referential adverbs (e.g. 也 yé 'also', 还 hái 'even'), pseudo degree adverb (e.g. 很 hěn 'very') adjacent to content words like adjectives, verbs, and nouns, all become flourishes; grammatical words like attributive marker 的 de and adverbial marker 地 de are passing notes. Nominal suffixes 儿 (ér) and 子 zǐ carry little weight and could be omitted, e.g. 一股儿 yī gǔr is no different from 一股 yī gǔ and 窗子上 chuāngzi shàng is replaceable by 窗上 chuāng shàng.

We can also see that at the end of a sentence or a string of words, the required disyllabic rhythm, as we have said before, may cut across word boundaries, e.g. 凉飕飕 *liángsōu | sōu* and 吹进来 *chuī jìn | lai*.

It is evident, therefore, that disyllabic rhythmic patterns in Chinese, being the smallest speech groups, may operate only within longer syntactic structures and must interact closely with sense groups.

Here is another example:

阿Q伏下去，使尽了平生的力画圆圈。他生怕被人笑话，立志要画得圆，但这可恶的笔不但很沉重，并且不听话，刚刚一抖一抖的几乎要合缝，却又向外一耸，画成瓜子模样了。
(鲁迅：《阿Q正传》)

ā Q fú xiàqu | shǐ jìn le píngshēng de lì huà yuánquān || tā shēngpà bèi rén xiàohuà | lizhì yào huà de yuán | dàn zhè kěwù de bǐ bùdàn hěn chénzhòng | bìngqiě bù tīnghuà | gānggāng yī dǒu yī dǒu de jīhū yào héfèng | què yòu xiàng wài yī sǒng | huà chéng guāzi múyàng le

阿Q | 伏下 | 去 | 使尽^了 | 平生的^的 | 力 | 画圆 | 圈 | 他生怕 | 被人 | 笑话 | 立志 | 要画得 | 圆 | 但这 | 可恶^的 | 笔 | 不但 | 很沉 | 重 | 并且 | 不听 | 话 | 刚刚 | 一抖 | 一抖^的 | 几乎 | 要合缝 | 却又 | 向外 | 一耸 | 画成 | 瓜子 | 模样^了。(鲁迅：《阿Q正传》)

ā Q | fú xià | qu 0 | shǐ jìn^{le} | píngshēng^{de} | lì 0 | huà yuán | quān 0 || tā shēngpà | bèi rén | xiàohuà | lizhì | yào huà de | yuán 0 | dàn zhè | kěwù^{de} | bǐ 0 | bùdàn | hěn chén | zhòng 0 | bìngqiě | bù tīng | huà 0 | gānggāng | yī dǒu | yī dǒu^{de} | jīhū | yào héfèng | què yòu | xiàng wài | yī sǒng | huà chéng | guāzi | múyàng^{le}

(lit.) A Q bend-down-go, use-to-the utmost **le** whole life **de** strength draw circle. He afraid by people ridicule, resolve have to draw **de** round, but this wretched **de** brush not only very heavy, but also not obey, just one-shake-one-shake **de** almost about to join seam, however again towards-outside one swerve, draw-into melon seed shape.

'A Q bent down, and, as painstaking as if his life depended on it, drew a circle. Afraid that people would laugh at him, he determined to make the circle round. However, not only was that wretched brush very heavy, but it would not do as it was told. Instead, it wobbled from side to side, and just as the line was about to close it swerved out again and made a shape like a melon seed.'

(Lu Xun, 'The True Story of A Q')

In this example, we see that pronouns and modal verbs may be seen as flourishes. In addition, when two words with weak stress come together (e.g. 但这 *dàn zhè* and 却又 *què yòu*) or when a word with a weak stress is followed by a monosyllabic item (e.g. 被人 *bèi rén* and 向外 *xiàng wài*), these too may form a disyllabic rhythm.

If an extra syllable is inserted after them, both the conjunction and the coverb return to their normal flourish status:

但这 可恶 ^的 笔	>	但这支 可恶 ^的 笔
dàn zhè kěwù ^{de} bǐ	>	dàn zhèi zhī kěwù ^{de} bǐ
却又 向外 一耸	>	却又 向外面 一耸
què yòu xiàng wài	>	què yòu xiàng wàimiàn
yī sǒng		yī sǒng

If we return to our earlier discussion of the indefinite-referenced 一 *yī*, and apply our disyllabic rhythmic analysis, we will see that, while one form of expression may be valid, another may not. Firstly the valid forms:

我写了(一)封信。wǒ xiě le (yī) fēng xìn
 我写了 | 一封 | 信。wǒ xiě le | yī fēng | xìn
 我写了封 | 信。wǒ xiě le fēng | xìn
 'I wrote a letter.'

Here both the strong and weak beats are in their proper place. This is also the case if the verb is disyllabic:

我口授了一封信。wǒ kǒushòu le yī fēng xìn
 我口授了 | 一封 | 信。wǒ kǒushòu le | yī fēng | xìn
 'I dictated a letter.'

However, the following sentence, as we have pointed out earlier, would be invalid, because a measure word cannot appear carrying a strong beat.

*我口授了 | 封信。wǒ kǒushòu le | fēng xìn

Any attempt to see 封 *fēng* as a flourish would also be unacceptable: a linguistic sequence like *fēng xìn* would not make sense to a listener.

*我口授了 | 封信。wǒ kǒushòu le | fēng xìn

A solution would of course be to make the direct object noun disyllabic, e.g. 急信 *jíxìn* 'an urgent letter', which would leave 封 *fēng* as an acceptable measure word:

我口授了 | 封急信。wǒ kǒushòu le | fēng jíxìn
 'I dictated an urgent letter.'

In summary, we may say that a disyllabic rhythm is the basic prosodic principle of the Chinese language. It is composed of a first-syllable strong beat and a second syllable weak beat. Such a rhythmic unit may be preceded or followed by a maximum of one flourish and one passing note. It may also contain just one strong beat and leave the weak beat to be realized by a pause.

These disyllabic rhythmic units may stand alone or combine to form sense groups where pauses are introduced. Sense groups may then combine to form utterances, in which cadences indicate syntactic completeness.

Only when an utterance or a sense group can be formed from the acceptable disyllabic rhythmic units we have defined can it be considered as grammatically acceptable in the language.

26.4 Rhythms of commonly discernible syntactic patterns

A number of rhythmic patterns can be identified that come up frequently in syntax.

26.4.1 'Verb + object' patterns

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| (a) monosyllabic verb + monosyllabic object: | X x |
| e.g. 看书 kànshū | |
| (b) disyllabic verb + disyllabic object: | X x X x |
| e.g. 浏览书籍 liúlǎn shūjí | |
| (c) monosyllabic verb + disyllabic object: | X x X 0⁸ |
| e.g. 看电影 kàn diànyǐng | |
| (d) *disyllabic verb + monosyllabic object: | X x X |
| e.g. *浏览书 liúlǎn shū | |

⁸ Note that the rhythmic cluster does not have to coincide with the lexical boundary, as we have already seen above.

(d) is invalid not only because it violates the end weight syntactic principle but also because a syntactically 'verb + object' pattern coincides with the rhythmic characteristic of a trisyllabic lexeme in the language, thus leading to a conflict in semantic expectations, e.g.

说明书 **shuōmíng shū** instruction manual
电子书 **diànzǐ shū** electronic book

26.4.2 Verbal reduplications

看看 kànkàn	X x
看一看 kàn yī kàn	X x X
看了看 kàn le kàn	X x X
讨论讨论 tāolùn tāolùn	X x X x
*讨论一讨论 ⁹ tāolùn yī tāolùn	X x * X x

— yī cannot be accepted in the last reduplication. In fact, it can be made a flourish only when it means ‘as soon as’ and is coupled with 就 jiù later in the sentence.

⁹ 一讨 yī tāo can, of course, make no sense, and that also explains why this pattern is impermissible.

26.4.3 The ‘attributive + headword’ patterns

This follows two basic rhythmic rules:

- (a) if the attributive is monosyllabic, the headword does not normally exceed two syllables. For example:

新书	xīn shū	X x	new book
新学校	xīn xuéxiào	X x X	new school
*新运动场	xīn yùndòngchǎng	X x X x	new sportsground

A quadrisyllabic phrase normally encodes a classical idiom or set expression. Having an attributive attached to one syllable of a trisyllabic lexeme and leaving the other two syllables to form another rhythmic unit makes the whole expression unintelligible. However, the attributive marker 的 *de* can be introduced to signal the fact that what follows is the headword:

新的运动场 xīn de yùndòngchǎng X x | X x | X new sportsground

In the second example, though the rhythmic unit cuts across the trisyllabic lexeme, it is what is expected of a trisyllabic word.

- (b) if the attributive is disyllabic or polysyllabic, the headword can be of any length.¹⁰ For example:

新买的书	xīn mǎi ^{de} shū	newly bought book(s)
新买的房子	xīn mǎi ^{de} fángzi	newly bought house
新买的洗衣机	xīn mǎi ^{de} xǐyī jī	newly bought washing machine

¹⁰ As we have seen in [Chapters 4](#) and [18](#), the attributive marker *de* usually marks longer attributives.

新买的电子游戏 **xīn mǎi** ^{de} | **diànzǐ** | **yóuxì**
newly bought electronic game(s)

新买的电子游戏机 **xīn mǎi** ^{de} | **diànzǐ** | **yóuxì** | **jī**
newly bought electronic game machine

26.5 Echoing patterns of singular rhythms

Language conventions are of course regularly ignored if a specific effect or style is required and the rules of rhythmic patterning are no exception. However, if non-standard cadence is introduced, it is usually echoed by a similarly non-standard pattern to ease the deviation for the listener's ear. For instance, take the following sentence:

临睡 | 前 | 我弟弟 | 总是 | 翻 | 故事 | 书 | 折腾 | 一番 | 才睡。

lín shuì | qián 0 | wǒ dìdì | zǒngshì | (0 fān | gùshi | shū) |
zhéténg | yī fān | cái shuì

(lit. on the point of sleep | before | my younger brother | always |
finger through | story | book | dilly-dally | one mw:occasion | only
then sleep)

When he goes to bed, my younger brother never goes to sleep
until he has glanced through a storybook and dilly-dallied for
a while.

Obviously, the rhythmic pattern **fān | gùshi | shū** in the middle of the utterance deviates from the normal disyllabic rhythm by introducing a pause before a monosyllabic verb followed by a disyllabic noun object, and as a result, the sentence sounds rather awkward and outlandish if not completely wrong. However, if an echoing phrase with a similar rhythm is introduced, the sentence becomes not only acceptable but quite enlivening:

临睡 | 前 | 我弟弟 | 总是 | 翻 | 故事 | 书 | 玩 | 玩具 | 熊 | 折腾 |
一番 | 才睡。

lín shuì | qián 0 | wǒ dìdì | zǒngshì | (0 fān | gùshi | shū 0) |
(0 wán | wánjù | xióng 0) | zhéténg | yī fān | cái shuì

(lit. on the point of sleep | before | my younger brother | always |
finger through | story | book | play with | toy | bear | dilly-dally |
one mw:occasion | only then sleep)

When he goes to bed, my younger brother never goes to sleep until
he has glanced through a storybook, played with his toy bear, and
dilly-dallied for a while.

This manipulation of unfamiliar rhythms, in fact, provides a refreshing variety to a more regular disyllabic rhythm and can breathe life into the flow of the prose rhythm.

This shows that if an unfamiliar rhythmic pattern is used in a sequence, it is unusual for it to be followed by another sequence with a different rhythm, especially when there is also a semantic affinity between the two sequences. For example, take the following:

我一路 | 走去 | 心情 | 舒畅 | 很振奋。

wǒ yī lù | zǒu qù | xīnqíng | shūchàng | hěn zhènfèn

(lit. I whole way walk-go, mood carefree, very enthused)

All along the way, I was in a carefree mood and very enthused.

Here, the cadence of the final sequence ^x X x, which is closely related semantically to the previous sequence X x X x, undermines the rhythmic consistency and makes the sentence jar on the ear.

However, the problem disappears if the sentence is reworded with an echoing pattern:

我一路 | 走去 | 心情 | 很舒畅 | 很振奋。

wǒ yī lù | zǒu qù | xīnqíng | hěn shūchàng | hěn zhènfèn

All along the way my mood was carefree and enthused.

or:

我一路 | 走去 | 心情 | 舒畅 | 精神 | 振奋。

wǒ yī lù | zǒu qù | xīnqíng | shūchàng | jīngshén | zhènfèn

All along the way my mood was carefree and my spirits enthused.

26.6 Two paragraphs by way of conclusion

Finally, as illustrations of the prosodic features of Chinese and their interaction with syntactic structures, we will cite two examples from Chinese writers. The first comes from the work of Lao She, an early master of modern Chinese prose:

风 | 吹弯了 | 路旁的 | 树木, | 撕碎了 | 店户的 | 布幌, | 揭净了 |

fēng 0 | chuīwán le | lùpáng de | shùmù | sīsuì le | diànhù de |

bùhuǎng | jiējìng le |

墙上的 | 报单, | 遮昏了 | 太阳, | 唱着, | 叫着, | 回荡着; |
qiáng shàng de | bàodān | zhēhūn le | tàiyáng | chàng zhe |
jiào zhe | huídàng zhe |

忽然 | 直驰, | 象惊狂 | 了的 | 大精 | 灵, | 扯天 | 扯地的 | 疾走; |
hūrán | zhíchí | xiàng jīngkuáng | le de | dà jīng | líng 0 |
chě tiān | chě dì de | jízǒu |

忽然 | 慌乱, | 四面 | 八方的 | 乱卷, | 象不知 | 怎好 |
hūrán | huāngluàn | sìmiàn | bāfāng de | luànjuǎn |
xiàng bù zhī | zěn hǎo |

而决定 | 乱撞的 | 恶魔; | 忽然 | 横扫, | 乘其 | 不备的 | 袭击着 |
ér juéding | luànzuàng de | è mó | hūrán | héngsǎo |
chéng qí | bù bèi de | xíjī zhe |

地上 | 的 | 一切, | 扭折了 | 树枝, | 吹掀了 | 屋瓦, | 撞断了 |
dì shàng de | yīqiè | niǔshé le | shùzhī | chuīxiān le | wūwǎ |
zhuàngduàn le |

电线..... (老舍《骆驼祥子》)
diànxiàn..... (lǎo shě: luòtuó xiángzi)

(lit.) wind blow-bend **le** road-side trees, tear to pieces shop **de**
 cloth signboard, tear-completely wall-on **de** notices, cover-darken
le sun, sing **zhe**, call **zhe**, resound **zhe**; suddenly directly-rush
 like startled-wild **le de** large demon, pull-heaven-pull-earth **de**
 swiftly-flee; suddenly alarmed-bewildered, four-sides-eight-directions
de random-sweep-along, like not-know-how-best **er** decide
 random-collide **de** devil; suddenly sideways-sweep, take advantage
 of its not ready **de** surprise attack **zhe** ground-on **de** everything,
 twist-snap tree-branch, blow-lift **le** house-tiles, strike-break **le**
 electric wires ...

'The strength of the wind bent the roadside trees, tore to pieces the
 shop signs and swept away the notices on the walls; it darkened
 the sun, singing, calling and resounding. It suddenly rushed like a
 huge, startled demon and dashed along pulling heaven and earth
 apart; suddenly in a frenzy it surged along in all directions like a
 devil that did not know what to crash into; and suddenly it swept
 away everything on the ground that was not expecting attack,
 snapping the branches off trees, blowing the tiles from roofs and
 breaking apart electric wires ...'

(Lao She, 'Camel Xiangzi')

You will see that in this avalanche of descriptive expressions with their echoing phrases, there are numerous examples of passing notes and quite a few flourishes. The insistent rhythms of the writing create a vivid description of the arrival of the storm.

Two specific things need to be pointed out here. Firstly, two normally weak syllables 了的 *le de* come together to form a disyllabic rhythmic beat. Depending on the tempo of speech, they may also be allotted separately to the preceding and following disyllabic rhythmic units as a passing note and a flourish:

| 象惊狂了 | 的大精 | 灵,

xiàng jīngkuáng le | de dà jīng | líng 0

Secondly, in writing, 的 *de* and 地 *de* used to be interchangeable, but there is an increasing tendency in contemporary writing to demarcate them: 的 *de* for attributives and 地 *de* for adverbials. However, here in the sense group

扯天 | 扯地的 | 疾走;

chě tiān | chě dì de | jí zǒu

because of a homographic clash with the last word 地 *dì* 'earth' of the preceding idiom, 的 *de* is used as an alternative.

The second example comes from a newspaper article by a contemporary writer:

天刚 | 蒙蒙 | 亮, | 我们 | 从波密 | 出发, | 随着 | 海拔 | 逐渐 |

tiān gāng | méngméng | liàng 0 | wǒmen | cóng bōmì |

chūfā | suízhe | hǎibá | zhújiàn |

升高, | 路况 | 也越来越 | 越差。| 连续 | 不断地 | 翻山 | 越岭、|

shēnggāo | lùkuàng | yě yuè lái | yuè chà | liánxù | bùduàn de

| fān shān | yuè líng |

蹚 | 泥石 | 流、| 过 | 塌方 | 区、| 越沟 | 壑、| 穿峡 | 谷, |

0 tāng | níshí | liú 0 | 0 guò | tāfāng | qū 0 | yuè gōu | hè 0 |

chuān xiá | gǔ 0 |

天空 | 一会儿 | 云雾 | 弥漫, | 一会儿 | 小雨 | 绵绵, | 一会儿 |

ěr tiānkōng | yīhuìr | yúnwù | mímán | yīhuìr | xiǎoyǔ |

miánmián | yīhuìr |

阳光 | 四射, | 一会儿 | 大雨 | 倾盆, | 泥泞、| 坑洼、| 碎石、|

yángguāng | sìshè | yīhuìr | yòu dà yǔ | qīngpén | ér níng |

kēngwā | suìshí |

积水 | 几乎 | 充满^了 | 简易^得 | 不能 | 再简易^的 | 所谓 | “跑” 了。
 jīshuǐ | jīhū | chōngmǎn le | jiǎnyì de | bùnéng | zài jiǎnyì de |
 suǒwèi | pǎo le

(成卫东: 时隔11年, 重走墨脱路)¹¹

(chéng wèi dōng: shí gé shíyī nián | chóng zǒu mòtuō lù)

(lit.) Sky just misty light, we from Bomê set out, follow **zhe** elevation gradually ascend-high, road condition poorer and poorer. Continuous unending **de** cross mountain, ford mud-rock flow, cross landslide area, leap gully, pass through gorge, **er** heaven one moment cloud and mist fill the air; one moment drizzle continuous, one moment sunlight four (directions) radiate, one moment also heavy rain falling in torrents, **er** mire, pits, broken stones, stagnant water almost fill **le** simple **de** not able further simple **de** so-called ‘road’ **le**.

‘It was just first light, when we set out from Bomê. With the gradual rise in elevation, the road conditions grew poorer and poorer. We endlessly traversed mountains, forded mud-rock flows, crossed landslides, leapt gullies, and passed through gorges. One moment the sky was filled with cloud and mist, the next continuous drizzle fell; one moment everywhere radiated with sunlight, the next heavy rain bucketed down. Mire, potholes, broken rocks and stagnant water almost filled the so-called ‘road’, which could not have been built any more primitively.’

(Cheng Weidong, ‘Ten years on, once again travelling on the Road to Mêdog’)

¹¹ The article was carried in *People’s Daily* (Overseas Edition), 11/02/2011.

The writing here is again full of balanced and rhythmic patterns.

What is most interesting about it is that wherever there appears an unusual rhythmic arrangement, it is duly echoed, making the progression varied yet vivid. For example:

Four syllables spanning three disyllabic rhythmic units:

蹚 | 泥石 | 流、 | 过 | 塌方 | 区、 |
 0 tāng | níshí | liú 0 | 0 guò | tāfāng | qū 0 |

Three syllables spanning two disyllabic rhythmic units:

越沟 | 壑、 | 穿峡 | 谷、 |
 yuè gōu | hè 0 | chuān xiá | gǔ 0 |

Echoing in identical forms:

一会儿 | 云雾 | 弥漫, | 一会儿 | 小雨 | 绵绵, |
yīhuìr | yúnwù | mímán | yīhuìr | xiǎoyǔ | miánmián |

A series of disyllabic rhythms:

而 泥泞、| 坑洼、| 碎石、| 积水 |
ér níning | kēngwā | suishí | jīshuǐ |

Stylistic considerations in syntactic constructions

Chinese syntactic constructions, as we have seen, are not merely governed by syntactic rules, but are subject to lexical and prosodic requirements as well. Only when all the conventions of syntax, collocation and prosody are taken into account can one decide if a particular construction is grammatical or not. These grammatical structures then provide the basis on which stylistically varying constructions may be built.

Communication, as we know, does not involve syntax alone; it also needs to exploit ranges of style to be completely effective. Stylistic considerations are, therefore, an important flourish added to the melody of syntax, and without these considerations, syntax is unlikely to break out of its prosaic limits and turn language into literature or poetry.

If we analyse the main stylistic features in Chinese syntactic construction, it is possible to identify two determining factors: one presentational and the other rhetorical, which separate or combine to provide qualities of tone and rhythm. They are both, of course, particularly characteristic of literary writing.

In order to give clear illustrations of these stylistic features, we have selected below examples of writing from the works of modern Chinese authors who make conscious use of the poetic dimensions of prose. In each case, the quotation is set out vertically on a section-by-section basis.

27.1 The presentational factor

Presentational needs, which are predominantly found in the realm of description, lead to the configuration of syntactic structures in order to exploit features like repetition, to register different focuses and emphases and simply to display variety of expression.

The following are commonly used stylistic configurations:

27.1.1 Layered or sequential images

(a) S S S . . . P (multi-subject structure)

- S 她那毛茸茸的头发, **tā nà máorōngrōng de tóufa**
Her downy hair,
- S 她那被雨水和眼泪冲没了的脂粉,
tā nà bèi yǔshuǐ hé yǎnlèi chōngmò le de zhǐfěn
her make-up washed away by rain and tears,
- S 有着一只尖削的鼻子和一张微瘪的嘴的黄脸,
yǒu zhe yī zhī jiān xuē de bízi hé yī zhāng wēi biē de zuǐ
de huáng liǎn
her pale face with its pointed nose and wizened mouth,
- S 她那蜷缩着的单薄的身, **tā nà quán suō zhe de dānbó de shēntǐ**
her thin, bent frame/body
- S 以及她的假笑, **yǐjí tā de jiǎ xiào**
and her false smile
- S 她的不大耐烦的声口, **tā de bù dà nàifán de shēng kǒu**
her somewhat impatient tone
- P 都在引起他的不满。 **dōu zài yǐnqǐ tā de bùmǎn**
All made him resentful.

Sha Ding 沙汀, yī ge qiūtiān de wǎnshàng
一个秋天的晚上, One Autumn Night

Here the cumulative impact of the sequence of subjects is enhanced by the variety of attributes – adjective, phrase, clause – that the language allows.

(b) S P, P, P . . . (multi-predicate structure)

- S 他 **tā**
He
- P 拿着一把点燃的香 **ná zhe yī bǎ diǎnrán de xiāng**
holding a bunch of lighted incense(-sticks)
- P 从长阶的左端走过来, **cóng chángjiē de zuǒduān zǒu guòlái**
walked over from the left side of the staircase,

- P 跨过那两尺高的专和小孩的腿为难的门坎
kuà guò nèi liǎng chǐ gāo de zhuān hé xiǎohái de tuǐ
wéinán de ménkǎn
 stepped over the two-foot-high threshold, which purposely
 caused problems for children,
- P 走进堂屋去, **zǒu jìn tángwū qù**
 walked into the hall,
- P 在所有的神龛前的香炉中插上一炷香,
zài suǒyǒu de shénkān qián de xiānglú zhōng chā shàng
yī zhù xiāng
 and stuck an incense-stick into each of the incense burners in
 front of the ancestral shrines,
- P 然后虔诚地敲响了那圆圆的碗形的铜罄。
ránhòu qiánchéng de qiāo xiǎng le nà yuányuán de
wǎnxíng de tóngqìng
 and afterwards piously struck/sounded the round, bowl-like brass
 bell.

He Qifang 何其芳, **lǎoren** 老人, An Old Man

This description is built on a series of verbal phrases in the predicate. Their syntactic structures differ from one to the next, and these distinctions add to the sense of precision in the actions of the man involved.

27.1.2 *Reiteration for cumulative effect*

In these two quotations, the writers again seek to build up a picture through repeating the elements that are linked syntactically and semantically.

(a) AX, BX, CX...

- S AX 茉莉的香, **mòli de xiāng**
 The fragrance of jasmine,
- BX 白兰花的香, **báilánhuā de xiāng**
 (the fragrance) of white orchid,
- CX 脂粉的香, **zhīfěn de xiāng**
 (the fragrance) of cosmetics,
- DX 沙衣裳的香... **shā yīshang de xiāng**
 (the fragrance) of silk robes,

EX 微波泛滥出甜的暗香,
wēibō fànyì chū tián de ànxiāng
and a hint of sweet fragrance issuing from the ripples

P AY 随着她们那些船儿荡,
suízhe tāmen nèixiē chuánr dàng
followed the motion of their boat,

BY 随着我们这船儿荡,
suízhe wǒmen zhèi chuánr dàng
followed the motion of our boat,

CY 随着大大小小一切的船儿荡。
suízhe dàdà xiǎoxiǎo yīqiè de chuánr dàng
and followed the motion of all the boats, large and small.

Yu Pingbo 俞平伯, **jiǎngshēng dēngyǐng li de qínhuáihé**
桨声灯影里的秦淮河, Qinhuai River with its Lights and Oars

In the above quotation, for example, by repeating the two key words 香 **xiāng** 'fragrance' and 荡 **dàng** 'to bob up and down or move from side to side' in similar constructions, the author recreates the atmosphere and sensation of a personal experience.

(b) AX, AY, AZ...

S 他 **tā**
He

P 深信 **shēnxìn**
firmly believed

S 理想的人生 **lǐxiǎng de rénshēng**
an ideal life

P AX 必须有爱, **bìxū yǒu ài**
must have love,

AY 必须有美, **bìxū yǒu měi**
must have beauty,

AZ 必须有自由, **bìxū yǒu zìyóu**
must have freedom.

S 他 **tā**
He

P 深信 **shēnxìn**
firmly believed

S 这三位一体的人生 **zhè sān wèi yītǐ de rénshēng**
this three-in-one life

P BX 是可以追求的, **shì kěyǐ zhuīqiú de**
could be pursued,

BY 至少是可以用纯洁的心血培养出来的。

zhishǎo shì kěyǐ yòng chúnjié de xīnxuè péiyǎng chūlai de
and at least could be fostered with honest effort.

Hu Shi 胡适, **dào xú zhì mó** 悼徐志摩,
In Memory of Xu Zhimo¹

¹ China's leading poet of the 1920s and 1930s, who was killed in a plane crash.

Here, the insistent repetition of 必须 **bìxū** 'must' and 深信 **shēnxìn** 'firmly believe', reinforces the description of the conviction and determination of the person being remembered.

27.1.3 Factorisation

In factorisation, the author tries to get across his message in small similarly constructed segments of language, one after another, in order to achieve maximum impact.

(a) A (X, Y, Z)

S 我 **wǒ**
I

P A 和 **hé**
with

X 那些谦卑的菜蔬, **nèixiē qiānbēi de cài shū**
those humble vegetables,

Y 那些高大的果树, **nèixiē gāodà de guǒ shù**
those lofty fruit trees,

Z 那些开着美丽的花的草木
nèixiē kāi zhe měilì de huā de cǎo mù
those plants with beautiful blossoms,

一块儿生活着。 **yī kuài r shēnghuó zhe**
was living together.

He Qifang 何其芳, **lǎoren** 老人, An Old Man

(b) A (X, Y, Z)

P X 在睡眠减少的长长的夜里,
zài shuìmián jiǎnshǎo de chángcháng de yè li
In long nights of reduced sleep,
X' 在荧荧的油灯下, **zài yíngyíng de yóudēng xià**
under a glimmering oil lamp,

S 我 **wǒ**
I

P Y 迟缓地、**chíhuǎn de**
slowly

Y' 详细地 **xiángxì de**
minutely

Z 回忆着 **huíyì zhe**
recollected

Z' 而且写着 **érqiě xiě zhe**
and wrote

O 我自己的一生的故事 ... **wǒ zìjǐ de yīshēng de gùshi**
the story of my life.

He Qifang 何其芳, **lǎoren** 老人, An Old Man

27.1.4 *Parallel matching*

In parallel matching, what the author seeks to achieve is to present closely connected ideas in consecutive and similar structures, so that they come across more forcibly.

(a) AX, BY, CZ ...

这榆树在园子的西北角上,
zhè yúshù zài yuánzi de xīběi jiǎo shàng
This elm tree was in the northwest corner of the garden,

A 来了风, **lái le fēng**
when the wind blew,

X 这榆树先啸; **zhè yúshù xiān xiào;**
This elm tree whistled

B 来了雨, **lái le yǔ**
when it rained,

Y 这榆树先就冒烟了。 **zhè yúshù xiān jiù mào yān le**
This elm tree gave off steam;

C 太阳一出来， **tàiyáng yī chūlái**
as soon as the sun came out,

Z 大榆树的叶子就发光了，
dà yúshù de yèzi jiù fāguāng le
This elm tree's leaves shone

它们闪烁得和沙滩上的蚌壳一样了。

tāmen shǎnshuò de hé shātān shàng de bàngké
yīyàng le

(and) they glittered like clam shells on the sand.

Xiao Hong 肖红, **hūlánhé zhuàn**
呼兰河传, Story of the Hulan River

(b) (A, B, C) (X, Y, Z)

A 虽同是灯船， **suī tóng shì dēngchuán**
Though it was also a light vessel,

B 虽同是秦淮， **suī tóng shì qínhuái**
though it was the same Qinhuai (River),

C 虽同是我们； **suī tóng shì wǒmen**
though it was still us,

X 却是灯影淡了， **què shì dīngyǐng dàn le**
yet the shadow from the light grew weaker,

Y 河水静了， **héshuǐ jìng le**
the river water went quiet,

Z 我们倦了， **wǒmen juàn le**
(and) we grew tired.

况且月儿将上了。 **kuàngqiě yuèr jiāng shàng le**
Moreover the moon was about to rise.

Yu Pingbo 俞平白, **jiǎngshēng dēngyǐng li de qínhuáihé**
桨声灯影里的秦淮河, Qinhuai River with its Lights and Oars

27.1.5 Inversion: attributives or adverbials after their headwords

Authors use inversion, which undermines linguistic expectations, as a means to attract the attention of their readers.

荷塘四面，**hétáng simiàn**

All round the lotus pond

长着许多树，**zhǎng zhe xǔduō shù**

were growing, numerous trees,

attributive: 葱葱郁郁的。**wěngwěngyùyù de**

lush and luxuriant.

Zhu Ziqing 朱自清, **lǜ** 绿, Green

我用手拍着你，**wǒ yòng shǒu pāi zhe nǐ**

I patted you with my hand

抚摩着你，**fǔmó zhe nǐ**

stroked you

adverbial: 如同一个十二三岁的小姑娘。

rútóng yī ge shí'èr sān suì de xiǎo gūniang

like a 12- or 13-year-old girl.

Zhu Ziqing 朱自清, **hétáng yuèsè** 荷塘月色,

Moonlight Over the Lotus Pond

27.2 The rhetorical factor

When elegance merges with forcefulness, the resulting structures display features such as balance, symmetry, crescendo and regularity and variety of rhythm and cadence.

27.2.1 Coupling: XY, XY

X 我爱热闹，**wǒ ài rènao**

I like bustle

Y 也爱冷静；**yě ài lěngjìng**

and (I) like calm too;

X 爱群居，**ài qúnjū**

(I) like living in crowds

Y 也爱独处。**yě ài dúchǔ**

and (I) like being alone.

Zhu Ziqing 朱自清, **hétáng yuèsè** 荷塘月色,

Moonlight Over the Lotus Pond

- X 我若能裁你以为带，**wǒ ruò néng cái nǐ yǐ wéi dài**
If I could cut you and make you into a girdle,
- Y 我将赠给那轻盈的舞女；
wǒ jiāng zèng gěi nà qīngyíng de wǔnǚ
I would give (it) to that slim and graceful dancing girl,
- Z 她必能临风飘举了。**tā bì néng línfēng piāojǔ le**
(and) she would surely rise in the breeze;
- X 我若能挹你以为眼，**wǒ ruò néng yì nǐ yǐ wéi yǎn**
If I could ladle you out and make you into an eye
- Y 我将赠给那善歌的盲妹；
wǒ jiāng zèng gěi nà shàngē de mángmèi
I would give (it) to that blind girl with the beautiful voice,
- Z 她必明眸善睐了。**tā bì míngmóu shàn lài le**
(and) she would certainly have bright eyes and a good gaze.

Zhu Ziqing 朱自清, **lǜ 绿**, Green

Aphorisms, of course, have their obvious rhythms and parallels:

- 玉不琢，**yù bù zhuó**
If jade is not carved,
- Y 不成器。**bù chéng qì**
(it) does not make a piece.
- X 明枪易躲，**míngqiāng yì duǒ**
Guns in the open are easy to avoid;
- Y 暗箭难防。**àn jiàn nán fáng**
hidden arrows are hard to defend against.
- X 只要功夫深，**zhǐyào gōngfu shēn**
If (you) work hard,
- Y 铁杵磨成针。**tiěchǔ móchéng zhēn**
(you) can grind an iron rod into a needle.
- X 世上无难事，**shìshàng wú nánshì**
There is nothing difficult in the world
- Y 只怕有心人。**zhǐpà yǒuxīnrén**
provided there are people with will.

27.2.2 *Progression: XY, XY, XY . . .*

我问他为什么带芭蕉扇，
wǒ wèn tā wèishénme dài bājiāoshàn
I asked him why he had brought a palm-leaf fan.

他回答说，**tā huídá shuō**
He replied saying

这东西妙用无穷：
zhè dōngxi miàoyòng wúqióng
this thing has endless magical uses:

- X 热的时候 **rè de shíhou**
when (it's) hot,
- Y 扇风，**shān fēng**
it fans (up) a breeze;
- X 太阳大的时候 **tàiyáng dà de shíhou**
when the sun is beating down,
- Y 遮荫，**zhē yīn**
(it) gives shade;
- X 下雨的时候 **xià yǔ de shíhou**
when it rains,
- Y 代伞，**dài sǎn**
(it) acts as an umbrella;
- X 休息的时候 **xiūxi de shíhou**
when it's time to rest,
- Y 当坐垫，**dàng zuòdiàn**
(it) serves as a cushion (to sit on).

这好比济公活佛的芭蕉扇。
zhè hǎobǐ jìgōng huófó de bājiāoshàn
It is exactly like the Living Buddha's palm-leaf fan.

Feng Zikai 丰子恺, **lúshān miànmù** 庐山面目,
The True Face of (Mount) Lushan

27.2.3 Echoing

Stylistic
considerations
in syntactic
constructions

Echoing may often be achieved through word-for-word repetition:

远处 **yuǎnchù**

In the distance

有一条小瀑布, **yǒu yī tiáo xiǎo pùbù**

there's a small waterfall

哗哗哗, **huāhuāhuā**

gurgling, gurgling

日夜不停地往下流, **rìyè bùtíng de wǎng xià liú**

night and day without cease it flows down,

E 往下流。 **wǎng xià liú**

flows down.

Liu Zhen 刘真, chángcháng de liúshuǐ

长长的流水, A Long Stream

他见过许多男少女, **tā jiàn guò xǔduō shàonán shàonǚ**

He had seen very many young men and women,

有的是在笑, **yǒude shì zài xiào**

some smiling,

E 笑得那样痴呆, **xiào de nèiyàng chīdāi**

smiling in that stupid manner;

有的哭, **yǒude kū**

others weeping,

E 哭得又那样失态。 **kū de yòu nèiyàng shītài**

weeping too in that unmannerly way.

Feng Zhi 冯至, sàinàhé pàn de wúmíng shàonǚ

塞纳河畔的无名少女, Unknown Girls by the Seine

It can also, as the following aphorisms demonstrate, bring together for contrast expressions of similar construction:

远亲 **yuǎnqīn**

A distant relative

不如 **bùrú**

is not as good as

- E 近邻。jìnlín
a close neighbour.
- 言有尽 yán yǒu jìn
Words are limited,
- 而 ér
but
- E 意无穷。yì wúqióng
the meaning is infinite.

(Aphorisms)

27.2.4 Alternation: long and short sentences

- short 没有风。méiyǒu fēng
There was no wind.
- long 门前池中的残荷梗 mén qián chí zhōng de cánhéngěng
The remaining lotus stems in the pool in front of the gate
时时忽然急剧地动摇起来, shí shí hūrán jíù de dòngyáo qǐlai
would from time to time suddenly begin to shake rapidly
接着便有如鲤鱼的活泼地跳跃
jiēzhe biàn yǒurú lǐyù de huópo de tiàoyuè
and then flapping vigorously like live carps
划破了死一样平静的水面。
huà pò le sǐ yīyàng píngjìng de shuǐmiàn
and break the death-like calm of the water's surface.

Mao Dun 茅盾, wù 雾, Mist

- short 志摩走了。zhímó zǒu le
(Xu) Zhimo has gone.
- long 我们这个世界里 wǒmen zhèi ge shìjiè lǐ
In this world of ours,
被带走了不少云彩。bèi dài zǒu le bùshǎo yúncái
many colourful clouds have been carried off.
- long 他在我们这些朋友之中,
tā zài wǒmen zhèixiē péngyou zhīzhōng
He amongst these friends of ours

真是一片可爱的云彩, **zhēnshì yī piàn kě'ài de yúncái**
was truly a lovable cloud,

永远是温暖的颜色, **yǒngyuǎn shì wēnnuǎn de yánsè**
always a warm colour,

永远是美的花样, **yǒngyuǎn shì měi de huāyàng**
always a beautiful pattern,

永远是可爱。 **yǒngyuǎn shì kě'ài**
always lovable.

Hu Shi 胡适, **dào xú zhímó** 悼徐志摩,
In Memory of Xu Zhimo

27.3 What lies beyond?

Syntax establishes general rules regarding the relationships between component elements in sentential construction, and any stereotypical sentence will therefore conform to these rules. However, the actual realisations of these stereotypical patterns take diverse forms. Such diversity stems not only from varied communicative objectives, but also from the language's prosodic inclinations as well as different linguistic foci, emphases, contexts and intentions. These differences in turn entail differing organising principles: contextual, functional, prosodic, focal, presentational and rhetorical.

Variations that are contextual (e.g. abbreviations and omissions), functional (e.g. statements vs questions, narrative vs expository), prosodic (disyllabic rhythm as the basis) and focal (e.g. emphatic sentences with 是 **shì**) have been covered in all our discussions of syntax proper. Presentational and rhetorical variations, being more of a stylistic nature, were therefore dealt with here in the current chapter with the hope that it may give some additional insight into how Chinese writers exploit and manipulate their language.

In the next four chapters, we shall develop these ideas and examine how syntax (as macro-syntax discussed throughout the book) interacts with morphology (a unique feature of the Chinese language whose words are formed on a micro-syntactic basis), how the different syntactic patterns work with and interchange with each other, and finally, how the underlying syntactic characteristics of Chinese are to be understood when converting into another language, particularly into a language like English.

Morphology and syntax (I)

Chinese morphology, as we shall see, is essentially Chinese syntax in miniature. In other words, all Chinese lexemes in present-day Chinese vocabulary, apart from those monosyllabic ones, are fundamentally syntactic forms on a smaller scale. This chapter discusses the basic components of the Chinese lexicon and particularly how those syntactically oriented minuscule configurations (or words as such) are formed.

In the next chapter, Morphology and Syntax (II), we shall concentrate on how those micro-syntactic forms behave when they are used in phrasal or sentential constructions larger than themselves. In other words, how those micro-syntactic forms interact with macrosyntactic forms to achieve adequate communication.

We start our discussion with monosyllabic words or morphemes of the lexicon. They are the building bricks of the whole vocabulary.

28.1 Monosyllabic lexemes and morphemes of the lexicon

Monosyllabic lexemes and morphemes are the foundation of the Chinese lexicon. All multisyllabic (particularly disyllabic) words and expressions are built on them. The difference between a monosyllabic lexeme and a monosyllabic morpheme is that the former can be used on its own, whereas the latter may be used only to combine with other morphemes or lexemes to form new words.

In this sense, lexemes are part of macrosyntax (though they may also be found to combine with other lexemes or morphemes to form new words or compounds), whereas morphemes are only part of morphology. They must first combine to become micro-syntactic words before they can be part of macrosyntax. For example,

人 **rén** ‘person, human being’ is a lexeme or an independent word. It may be used freely on its own¹:

一个人 **yī ge rén** ‘a person’ is a phrase, i.e. a syntactic construction. 人 **rén** is substitutable by another lexeme like 一个梨 **yī ge lí** ‘a pear’. So we see that both 人 **rén** and 梨 **lí** are independent lexemes or words.

¹ By ‘freely on its own’, we mean that the lexeme may be used freely in a syntactic unit larger than itself, for example, in a phrase, sentence, and so on. It does not necessarily mean that it can be used by itself alone to form a sentence.

The numeral 一 **yī** can likewise be changed to 三 **sān** ‘three’, e.g. 三个人 **sān ge rén** ‘three people’. The measure word 个 **gè** may also be replaced by another measure word, e.g. 一批人 **yī pī rén** ‘a group of people’. So we see that both numerals and measure words are independent lexemes.

On the other hand, a monosyllabic item like 者 **zhě**, which may also signify a person or a human being, is not an independent lexeme and cannot be used on its own in a syntactic structure. We cannot therefore say, e.g. *一个者 **yī ge zhě**.

As it is only a morpheme, it must be combined with another lexeme or morpheme to form an independent word before it can be used in a syntactic construction, e.g.

记者 **jìzhě** ‘journalist’ (记 **jì** ‘to record’)
学者 **xuézhě** ‘scholar’ (学 **xué** ‘to study’)
长者 **zhǎngzhě** ‘senior citizen’ (长 **zhǎng** ‘old, senior’)

This can be extended to:

一个记者 **yī ge jìzhě** ‘a journalist’
一个学者 **yī ge xuézhě** ‘a scholar’
一个长者 **yī ge zhǎngzhě** ‘a senior citizen’

The Chinese vocabulary is thus made up of monosyllabic building blocks like these. They are either independent lexemes or dependent morphemes. Irrespective of their morphological or syntactic status, they are all listed as separate entries in a Chinese dictionary, being regarded as self-contained phonological or graphemic primes in speech and writing.

28.1.1 *Where does the monosyllabic part of the lexicon belong?*

Monosyllabic words or morphemes are seen to belong to the following four groups: (1) basic content words; (2) grammatical words that help to

build and articulate syntactic constructions; (3) suffix- or prefix-like morphemes that help to construct new lexemes; and (4) a closed set of phonologically oriented words.²

² There is a small set of morphemes which are not included here as monosyllabic morphemes. In fact, they may be regarded as submorphemes. Though they are written and pronounced as separate graphemes and monosyllables like others, they must always appear as a pair in a fossilised disyllabic lexeme, e.g. 憧憬 *chōngjǐng* 'to yearn for'. They cannot be used to form other new words. These submorphemes will be discussed in full in the section on juxtapositional lexemes.

28.1.1.1 Monosyllabic content words

Monosyllabic content words form the basis of the lexicon. They are:

Basic nouns: e.g. 车 *chē* 'vehicle', 船 *chuán* 'boat', 狗 *gǒu* 'dog', 猫 *māo* 'cat', 树 *shù* 'tree', 花 *huā* 'flower, blossom', 山 *shān* 'mountain, hill', 水 *shuǐ* 'water', 风 *fēng* 'wind', 雨 *yǔ* 'rain', 手 *shǒu* 'hand', 脚 *jiǎo* 'foot', 钱 *qián* 'money', 桥 *qiáo* 'bridge', 灯 *dēng* 'lamp, light', 床 *chuáng* 'bed', 字 *zì* 'Chinese written characters', etc.

Basic adjectives: e.g. 大 *dà* 'big', 小 *xiǎo* 'small', 长 *cháng* 'long', 短 *duǎn* 'short', 高 *gāo* 'high, tall', 矮 *ǎi* 'short (in stature)', 胖 *pàng* 'fat, obese', 瘦 *shòu* 'slim, thin', 多 *duō* 'many, much', 少 *shǎo* 'few, little', 远 *yuǎn* 'far', 近 *jìn* 'near', 男 *nán* '(human) male', 女 *nǚ* '(human) female', 方 *fāng* 'square', 圆 *yuán* 'round, circular', etc.³

Verbs indicating basic relations and physical actions or movements (of hands, legs, head, and so on): e.g. 是 *shì* 'to be', 有 *yǒu* 'to have', 打 *dǎ* 'to hit', 拉 *lā* 'to pull', 推 *tuī* 'to push', 按 *àn* 'to press', 拿 *ná* 'to take, to hold', 放 *fàng* 'to put', 扔 *rēng* 'to throw', 来 *lái* 'to come', 去 *qù* 'to go', 跑 *pǎo* 'to run', 跳 *tiào* 'to jump', 踢 *tī* 'to kick', 吃 *chī* 'to eat', 喝 *hē* 'to drink', 说 *shuō* 'to say', 唱 *chàng* 'to sing', 看 *kàn* 'to look, to see', 听 *tīng* 'to listen, to hear', etc.

³ It can be observed that in many cases the weaker (or sometimes undesirable) term in the dichotomy is more likely to adopt the low, third tone on a vowel, which is usually *ǎ*: e.g. 小 *xiǎo* 'small', 少 *shǎo* 'few, little', 短 *duǎn* 'short', 矮 *ǎi* 'short (in stature)', 浅 *qiǎn* 'shallow', 窄 *zhǎi* 'narrow', 扁 *biǎn* 'flattened', 软 *ruǎn* 'soft', 远 *yuǎn* 'far', 冷 *lěng* 'cold', 假 *jiǎ* 'false', 险 *xiǎn* 'dangerous', 老 *lǎo* 'old', 懒 *lǎn* 'lazy', 丑 *chǒu* 'ugly', 歹 *dǎi* 'bad', 晚 *wǎn* 'late', 女 *nǚ* 'female', etc. (美 *měi* 'beautiful', 好 *hǎo* 'good', 早 *zǎo* 'early' are obvious exceptions.)

Almost all the *coverbs*: e.g. 在 **zài** 'in, at (to exist)', 往 **wàng/wǎng** 'to, towards', 用 **yòng** 'with, by (to make use of)', etc.

Basic *pronouns*: e.g. 你 **nǐ** 'you', 我 **wǒ** 'I, me', 他 **tā** 'he, him', 她 **tā** 'she, her', 它 **tā** 'it', 谁 **shuí** 'who', 这 **zhè** 'this', 那 **nà** 'that', 之 **zhī** (in classical Chinese) 'it' (in the accusative case), 其 **qí** (also classical) the third person (as a possessive or in the accusative), etc.

Basic *numerals*: e.g. 一 **yī** 'one', 二 **èr** 'two' (also 两 **liǎng** 'two'), 三 **sān** 'three', etc.

Almost all the *measure words*: e.g. 个 **gè** (for all sorts of beings and things), etc.

Some basic *adverbs*: e.g. 先 **xiān** 'first', 全 **quán** 'completely', 再 **zài** 'again', 又 **yòu** 'once again', 只 **zhǐ** 'only', etc.

Some *modal verbs*: e.g. 能 **néng** 'can, may', 会 **huì** 'to be able to, to be likely to', 要 **yào** 'to want to, must', 肯 **kěn** 'to be willing to', 敢 **gǎn** 'to dare', etc.

All the *monosyllabic variants of positional (or spatial) nouns*: e.g. 上 **shàng** (short for 上面 **shàngmiàn** or 上边 **shàngbiān**), 下 **xià** (short for 下面 **xiàmiàn** or 下边 **xiàbiān**), 中 **zhōng** (short for 中间 **zhōngjiān**), 里 **lǐ** (short for 里面 **lǐmiàn** or 里边 **lǐbiān**), etc.

28.1.1.2 Monosyllabic grammatical words

All function words: e.g. 了 **le**, 把 **bǎ**, 被 **bèi**, etc (see Morphology and Syntax [II] for a complete list).

28.1.1.3 Monosyllabic morphemes

They are used only to form lexemes and cannot go into a syntactic structure on their own.

suffix-like morphemes:

儿 **ér/r** as in 婴儿 **yīng'ér** 'baby, infant', 碴儿 **chár** 'shards, fragments', 玩意儿 **wányìr** 'toy, gadget', etc.

子 **zi** as in 桌子 **zhuōzi** 'table', 椅子 **yǐzi** 'chair', 孩子 **háizi** 'child', 儿子 **érzi** 'son', etc.

民 **mín** 'people' as in 人民 **rénmín** 'people', 居民 **jūmín** 'resident', 难民 **nànmín** 'refugee', etc.

物 **wù** 'entity' as in 动物 **dòngwù** 'animal', 植物 **zhíwù** 'plant', 微生物 **wēishēngwù** 'bacteria', etc.

品 **pǐn** 'article' as in 物品 **wùpǐn** 'things', 商品 **shāngpǐn** 'commodities', 化妆品 **huàzhuāngpǐn** 'cosmetics', etc.

法 **fǎ** 'method, approach' as in 想法 **xiǎngfǎ**⁴ 'thoughts, way of thinking' (想 **xiǎng** 'to think'), 看法 **kànfǎ** 'views, opinions' (看 **kàn** 'to look'), 办法 **bànfǎ** 'way, approach, measure' (办 **bàn** 'to deal with') etc.

化 **huà** '-ize' as in 退化 **tuihuà** 'to degenerate, to retrogress', 进化 **jìnhuà** 'to evolve', 现代化 **xiàndàihuà** 'to modernize', etc.

动 **dòng** 'to move' as in 移动 **yídòng** 'to shift, move (horizontally)', 摆动 **bǎidòng** 'to oscillate, to swing', 摇动 **yáodòng** 'to shake', 振动 **zhèndòng** 'to vibrate', 流动 **liúdòng** 'to flow', 滚动 **gǔndòng** 'to roll', 跳动 **tiàodòng** 'to pulsate', 晃动 **huàngdòng** 'to rock' etc.

⁴ The morpheme 法 **fǎ** 'way, method' in this connection may also be regarded as a headword modified respectively by verbal morphemes 想 **xiǎng** 'to think', 看 **kàn** 'to look', and 办 **bàn** 'to deal with'. These words may therefore be designated disyllabic lexemes of a modificational type. There are quite a number of dependent morphemes in the lexicon, e.g. 者 **zhě** '-er/or/ar, -ist, etc', 学 **xué** '-ology, etc', and so on, which can be considered as following either morphological or syntactic orientation in their word formation.

All true *postpositions*, which have a function similar to English prepositions:

做 **zuò** 'regard as, act as', as in 当做 **dàngzuò** 'to consider as, treat as', 看做 **kànzuo** 'to regard as', 叫做 **jiàozuo** 'to be called, be known as'

作 **zuò** 'regard as, act as', as in 比作 **bǐzuò** 'to use as a comparison for'

为 **wéi** 'become', as in 视为 **shìwéi** 'to regard as, consider as', 成为 **chéngwéi** 'to become', 称为 **chēngwéi** 'to be called', 作为 **zuòwéi** 'to regard as, take for'

成 **chéng** 'become', as in 当成 **dàngchéng** 'to regard as, consider as', 看成 **kàncéng** 'to take for'

于 **yú** 'at, in etc' as in 善于 **shànyú** 'to be good at', 乐于 **lèyú** 'to be happy to', 用于 **yòngyú** 'to use in/on', 属于 **shǔyú** 'to belong to', 处于 **chǔyú** 'to be in (a particular condition/position)', 在于 **zàiyú** 'to lie in, rest with; to depend on', 胜于 **shèngyú** 'to be better than', 易于 **yìyú** 'to be apt to', 起源于 **qǐyuányú** 'to originate in', 取决于 **qǔjuéyú** 'to depend on, be decided by'

予 **yǔ** 'to, on' as in 寄予 **jìyǔ** 'to place (hope etc) in/on', 给予 **jǐyǔ** 'to give (to)', 赋予 **fùyǔ** 'to bestow on, endow with'

以 **yǐ** 'about' as in 予以 **yǔyǐ** 'to give, grant, present', 加以 **jiāyǐ** 'to handle, deal with (a situation)', 得以 **déyǐ** 'so that ... can/may ...', 致以 **zhìyǐ** 'to extend, give (greetings etc)'
 及 **jí** 'on, to', as in 涉及 **shèjí** 'to involve, touch upon', 危及 **wēijí** 'to endanger', 殃及 **yāngjí** 'to bring disaster to', 波及 **bōjí** 'to spread to', 旁及 **pángjí** 'to take up incidentally', 累及 **lèijí** 'to involve, drag in', 惠及 **huìjí** 'to favour, bring benefit to', 以及 **yǐjǐ** 'as well as'
 得 **dé** 'to get', as in 取得 **qǔdé** 'to gain, acquire', 赢得 **yíngdé** 'to win, gain', 省得 **shěngdé** 'to avoid, save', 免得 **miǎndé** 'so as to avoid', 乐得 **lèdé** 'to be only too glad to'

prefix-like morphemes:

可 **kě** '-able' as in 可爱 **kě'ài** 'lovely, lovable' (爱 **ài** 'to love'), 可怜 **kělián** 'pitiable' (怜 **lián** 'to pity, to feel sorry for'), 可怕 **kěpà** 'frightening, terrible' (怕 **pà** 'to be afraid'), 可笑 **kěxiào** 'ridiculous' (笑 **xiào** 'to laugh'), etc.

好 **hǎo** as a verbal prefix 'to be good, convenient, or easy (in a process)' as in 好看 **hǎokàn** 'good-looking', 好听 **hǎotīng** 'pleasant to listen to', 好吃 **hǎochī** 'tasty, good to eat', 好喝 **hǎohē** 'good to drink', 好使 **hǎoshǐ** 'easy to use', 好用 **hǎoyòng** 'easy to use', 好办 **hǎobàn** 'easy to handle', 好治 **hǎozhì** 'easy to cure', 好洗 **hǎoxǐ** 'easy to wash', 好回答 **hǎohuídá** 'easy to answer', 好猜 **hǎocāi** 'easy to guess'

多 **duō** 'multi-' as in 多边 **duōbiān** 'multilateral', 多维 **duōwéi** 'multidimensional', 多元 **duōyuán** 'multivariate', etc.

半 **bàn** 'semi-' as in 半决赛 **bānjuésài** 'semi-final', 半导体 **bāndǎotǐ** 'semi-conductor', 半元音 **bānyuányīn** 'semi-vowel', etc.

打 **dǎ** as a prefix to adjectival or verbal morphemes to produce verbs as in 打滑 **dǎhuá** 'to slip, slide', 打蔫 **dǎniān** 'to wither, droop', 打斜 **dǎxié** 'to incline, tilt', etc, as well as in 打扮 **dǎbàn** 'to dress up', 打听 **dǎtīng** 'to inquire', 打搅 **dǎjiǎo** 'to disturb, trouble', 打扰 **dǎrǎo** 'to disturb, trouble', 打消 **dǎxiāo** 'to dispel', etc.

The above list is not complete but covers some of the most obvious examples.

28.1.1.4 Monosyllabic phonologically oriented lexemes

In the lexicon, there is a non-productive closed set of phonologically oriented lexemes using methods of fusion, e.g.

别 **bié** as in 别动 **biédòng** ‘don’t move’ (a fusion of 不 **bù** ‘not’ and 要 **yào** ‘to want’)

甬 **béng** as in 你甬管 **nǐ béng guǎn** ‘(lit. you needn’t be concerned about this) none of your business’ (a fusion of 不 **bù** ‘not’ and 用 **yòng** ‘to need, to use’)

诸 **zhū** as in 付诸行动 **fù zhū xíngdòng** ‘to put into practice’ (a fusion of 之 **zhī** ‘it’ and 于 **yú** ‘to’)

啦 **lā** ‘an end-of-sentence exclamatory particle’ (a fusion of 了 **le** and 啊 **a**)

28.2 An overall view of the syntactically oriented part of the lexicon

By syntactically oriented part of the lexicon, we mean all the words in the vocabulary that are formed through syntactic rules or orientations.

As the great majority of words in the lexicon are disyllabic, we shall start our discussion with the formation of disyllabic lexemes.

28.2.1 Syntactically oriented disyllabic lexemes

Disyllabic lexemes are formed by (1) juxtaposition; (2) modification; (3) predication; (4) ‘verb + object’ construction; (5) ‘verb + complement’ construction.

The resultant disyllabic lexemes are respectively called juxtapositional lexemes, modificational lexemes, predicational lexemes, governmental lexemes, and complemental lexemes.

28.2.1.1 Juxtapositional lexemes

Juxtapositional lexemes are disyllabic words that are formed by placing two monosyllabic lexemes and/or morphemes of the same word class side by side. Semantically speaking, however, the two juxtaposed components can be synonyms, antonyms or co-hyponyms.

28.2.1.1.1 Co-hyponymic juxtapositions are, by their very nature, mostly nouns, e.g.

姓名 **xìngmíng** ‘name’ (姓 **xìng** ‘surname’, 名 **míng** ‘first name’)
国家 **guójiā** ‘nation’ (国 **guó** ‘state, country’, 家 **jiā** ‘family’)

饮食 **yǐnshí** 'food and drink' (饮 **yǐn** 'drink', 食 **shí** 'food')
 招呼 **zhāohū** 'v. to greet, n. greeting' (招 **zhāo** 'to beckon',
 呼 **hū** 'to call')
 歌曲 **gēqǔ** 'song' (歌 **gē** 'lyrics', 曲 **qǔ** 'music')
 尺寸 **chǐcùn** 'measurement' (尺 **chǐ** 'a Chinese foot',
 寸 **cùn** 'a Chinese inch')
 泥沙 **níshā** 'silt' (泥 **ní** 'mud', 沙 **shā** 'sand')
 潮汐 **cháo xī** 'tide' (潮 **cháo** 'morning tide', 汐 **xī** 'evening tide')
 风水 **fēngshuǐ** 'feng shui, geomancy' (风 **fēng** 'wind', 水 **shuǐ** 'water')
 根源 **gēnyuán** 'cause' (根 **gēn** 'roots', 源 **yuán** 'source, fountain-head')
 筋骨 **jīngǔ** 'physique, health' (筋 **jīn** 'sinews', 骨 **gǔ** 'bones')

Co-hyponymic juxtapositions often produce figurative meanings, e.g.

桑榆 **sāngjǔ** 'old age' (桑 **sāng** 'mulberry' and 榆 **jú** 'elm', behind
 which the sun sets)
 牢笼 **lǎolóng** 'bonds, shackles' (牢 **láo** 'prison' and 笼 **lóng** 'cage')
 薪水 **xīnshuǐ** 'salary' (薪 **xīn** 'firewood' and 水 **shuǐ** 'water', which
 were considered most important to daily sustenance, similar to 'salt'
 in the formation of the English word 'salary')
 方圆 **fāngyuán** 'the surrounding area' (方 **fāng** 'square' and
 圆 **yuán** 'circle', which circumscribe the area)
 一二 **yī'èr** 'a little' (一 **yī** 'one' or 二 **èr** 'two')
 泰斗 **tàidǒu** 'leading authority' (泰 **tài** short for 泰山 **tàishān**
 'Mount Tai', 斗 **dǒu** as in 北斗星 **běidǒuxīng** 'The Plough')

Apart from nouns, a good number of co-hyponymic juxtapositions are adjectives and a small number are verbs:

仁慈 **réncí** 'adj. kind' (仁 **rén** 'benevolent', 慈 **cí** 'merciful')
 正直 **zhèngzhí** 'honest, righteous' (正 **zhèng** 'upright', 直 **zhí** 'straight')
 势利 **shìlì** 'snobbish' (势 **shì** 'high position, power', 利 **lì** 'advantage, profit')
 热闹 **rènao** 'bustling with activity' (热 **rè** 'hot', 闹 **nao** 'noisy, boisterous')
 圆滑 **yuánhuá** 'slick, suave' (圆 **yuán** 'round', 滑 **huá** 'slippery')
 紧张 **jǐnzhāng** 'nervous, keyed up' (紧 **jǐn** 'tight', 张 **zhāng** 'tense')
 温柔 **wēnróu** 'gentle' (温 **wēn** 'lukewarm', 柔 **róu** 'soft')
 真诚 **zhēnchéng** 'sincere' (真 **zhēn** 'genuine', 诚 **chéng** 'honest')
 感觉 **gǎnjué** 'v. to feel; n. sensation' (感 **gǎn** 'to feel', 觉 **jué** 'to sense')
 踢蹬 **tīdēng** 'to jiggle one's feet; (fig.) to squander' (踢 **tī** 'to kick',
 蹬 **dēng** 'to treadle')
 拉扯 **lāchě** 'to chat, to gossip' (拉 **lā** 'to pull', 扯 **chě** 'to tug')
 权衡 **quánhéng** 'to weigh, consider' (权 **quán** 'the weight of a
 steelyard', 衡 **héng** 'the graduated arm of a steelyard')

斟酌 **zhēnzuó** ‘to deliberate on, to mull over’ (斟 **zhēn** ‘to pour out wine’, 酌 **zuó** ‘to drink wine’)
影响 **yǐngxiǎng** ‘influence; to influence’ (影 **yǐng** ‘shadow’, 响 **xiǎng** ‘sound’)
推敲 **tuīqiāo** ‘to weigh one’s words; deliberation’ (推 **tuī** ‘to push’, 敲 **qiāo** ‘to knock’) – based on the story of a Tang poet, 贾岛 **jiǎdǎo**, who sought advice from another poet, 韩愈 **hányù**, on whether it was better to use the word 推 **tuī** or 敲 **qiāo** in one of his poetic lines.

There is a specific set of co-hyponymically juxtaposed lexemes in the lexicon which we might call ‘genetic compounds’. They include a small number of nouns indicating birds and insects, where the morpheme that indicates the male often precedes the morpheme that indicates the female, e.g.

凤凰 **fènghuáng** ‘phoenix’ (凤 **fèng** the male bird, 凰 **huáng** the female bird)
鸳鸯 **yuānyāng** ‘mandarin ducks’ (鸳 **yuān** the drake, 鸯 **yāng** the duck)
鹦鹉 **yīngwǔ** ‘parrot’ (鹦 **yīng** the male bird, 鹉 **wǔ** the female bird)
蟋蟀 **xīshuài** ‘cricket’ (蟋 **xī** the male insect, 蟀 **shuài** the female insect)
蜘蛛 **zhīzhū**⁵ ‘spider’ (蜘 **zhī** the male arachnid, 蛛 **zhū** the female arachnid)

⁵ Some of the ‘genetic compounds’ may also be ‘phonetic compounds’, e.g. 蜘蛛 **zhīzhū** ‘spider’ and 鸳鸯 **yuānyāng** ‘mandarin ducks’ are both alliterated compounds, and 蜻蜓 **qīngtíng** ‘dragonfly’ is a rhymed compound. See below.

Though it is not entirely clear, the following are probably formed on the same male-female basis:

蝴蝶 **húdié** ‘butterfly’
蝌蚪 **kēdǒu** ‘tadpole’
蜻蜓 **qīngtíng** ‘dragonfly’

And in the case of 蚯蚓 **qiūyǐn** ‘earthworm’, which is bisexual, the two morphemes more than likely follow the convention and take the form of a ‘genetic compound’.

Despite the genetic differences encoded within these lexemic compounds, they can like any other common nouns at any time still indicate one member of the species, male or female: e.g.

一只蜘蛛 **yī zhī zhīzhū** ‘a spider’
两只蝴蝶 **liǎng zhī húdié** ‘two butterflies’

One thing we might note about co-hyponymic juxtapositions is that, though the juxtaposed components of a particular lexeme must belong to the same word class, it does not follow that the resultant lexeme must necessarily belong to the same word class as its components. The adjective 势利 *shìlì* ‘snobbish’, for example, is composed of 势 *shì* ‘high position, power’ and 利 *lì* ‘advantage, profit’, which are both nouns; and the verb 权衡 *quánhéng* ‘to weigh, consider’ is also made up of two nouns: 权 *quán* ‘the weight of a steelyard’ and 衡 *héng* ‘the graduated arm of a steelyard’.

Similarly, the juxtapositional lexeme 拥挤 *yōngjǐ* ‘crowded’ is an adjective, but it nevertheless consists of two synonymous verbal components 拥 *yōng* ‘to jostle, swarm’ and 挤 *jǐ* ‘to squeeze’; and 动荡 *dòngdàng* ‘turmoil, turbulence’ is more often used as a noun, but is again made up of two verb lexemes 动 *dòng* ‘to move’ and 荡 *dàng* ‘to swing, sway’.

This possible contrast is also true of other types of juxtaposition. The word class or category assigned to any particular lexeme is in fact not determined by its micro internal syntactic composition but by its behaviour in the macrosyntactic constructions.

28.2.1.1.2 **Antonymous juxtapositions**, as we shall see, occur mostly, if not exclusively, with nouns⁶ and their formulations are open ended. By that we mean that all antonymous lexemes or morphemes (the majority of which are adjectival in nature) can be readily juxtaposed to result in a noun lexeme, which covers the whole spectrum of meaning between the two antonymous extremes.

⁶ Including a small number of adverbs, e.g. 始终 *shǐzhōng* ‘all along, from start to finish’ (始 *shǐ* ‘beginning’, 终 *zhōng* ‘end’), 反正 *fǎnzhèng* ‘all the same, anyway’ (反 *fǎn* ‘negative’, 正 *zhèng* ‘positive’). If the composing morphemes are verbal in nature, they may sometimes be used as verbs other than nouns.

For instance, a tailor will need to take measurements to ensure that the end product fits, and he or she will obviously be concerned with:

大小 *dàxiǎo* ‘size’ (大 *dà* ‘large’, 小 *xiǎo* ‘small’) i.e. the whole spectrum of ‘size’ from ‘large’ to ‘small’
 长短 *chángduǎn* ‘length’ (长 *cháng* ‘long’, 短 *duǎn* ‘short’)
 肥瘦 *féishòu* ‘girth, waist’ (肥 *féi* ‘fat’, 瘦 *shòu* ‘thin’)
 宽窄 *kuānzhǎi* ‘width, size’ (宽 *kuān* ‘wide’, 窄 *zhǎi* ‘narrow’)

A customer, satisfied with the end product, might say something like:

大小正好。 *dàxiǎo zhèng hǎo* The size is just right.
 长短正合适。 *chángduǎn zhèng héshì* It’s just the right length.

Antonymous juxtapositions are numerous and here are a few examples:

- 东西 **dōngxī**⁷ 'thing' (东 **dōng** 'east', traditionally representing the east market of a town, and 西 **xī** 'west, the west market', i.e. what one gets from the markets practically covers everything.)
 冷暖 **lěngnuǎn** 'changes in temperature, the ways of the world, well-being' (冷 **lěng** 'cold', 暖 **nuǎn** 'warm', therefore covering all weather conditions and, by extension, life in general.)
 是非 **shìfēi** 'truth, right and wrong' (是 **shì** 'right', 非 **fēi** 'wrong')
 矛盾 **máodùn** 'contradiction, conflict' (矛 **máo** 'spear', 盾 **dùn** 'shield', i.e. the shield opposes the spear.)
 起伏 **qǐfú** 'vicissitudes, ups and downs' (起 **qǐ** 'to rise', 伏 **fú** 'to go down')
 呼吸 **hūxī** 'breath, respiration' (呼 **hū** 'to exhale', 吸 **xī** 'to inhale')

⁷ Note that **xī** in **dōngxī** has lost its tone as it has become unaccented in usage.

The last two examples given above are composed of verb lexemes/morphemes. Such words may often be used either as a noun or a verb. Here 起伏 **qǐfú** as a verb will mean 'to undulate', and 呼吸 **hūxī**, 'to breathe'.

Antonymous juxtaposition is also one of the most versatile word-formation devices of the lexicon. If we take the verbs 来 **lái** 'to come' and 去 **qù** 'to go' for example, we find the following five juxtapositions:

- 来去 **láiqù** 'to come and go', as in 来去自由 **láiqù zìyóu** 'free to come and go'
 来回 **lái huí** 'to make a round trip; a round trip', as in 一张来回票 **yī zhāng lái huí piào** 'a return (ticket)' (回 **huí** 'to return')
 来往 **lái wǎng** 'to have dealings with; social contact' (往 **wǎng** 'to go towards'), as in 跟他没有来往 **gēn tā méiyǒu lái wǎng** 'to have no dealings with him'
 去留 **qùliú** 'to go or stay' (留 **liú** 'to stay'), as in 去留自便 **qùliú zìbiàn** 'free to go or stay'
 去就 **qùjiù** 'to quit or stay (in a job)' (就 **jiù** 'to take up a job'), as in 去就未定 **qùjiù wèi dìng** 'whether to quit or stay in office is still undecided'

From these examples, we can see that a particular lexeme or morpheme may have a different antonym in a different context, thereby producing a different meaning. 败 **bài**, for instance, may mean either 'defeat' or 'failure', hence the following two antonymous juxtapositions:

- 胜败 **shèngbài** 'victory or defeat'
 成败 **chéngbài** 'success or failure'

The antonymous juxtapositions given above are all established lexemes in the lexicon, but new ones can be easily coined. For example, degree of difficulty with reference to textbooks is expressed by 深浅 **shēnqiǎn** (深 **shēn** ‘deep’, 浅 **qiǎn** ‘shallow’), which is already in the lexicon, but to coin something like 难易 **nányì** (难 **nán** ‘difficult’, 易 **yì** ‘easy’) would be equally acceptable.

28.2.1.1.3 **Synonymous juxtapositions** comprise the majority of juxtapositional lexemes, and in fact constitute the greater part of all the disyllabic lexemes. Two characteristics of synonymous juxtapositions merit attention.

Firstly, synonyms include not only close synonyms but also words or morphemes from related semantic domains. These morphemes are normally, though not always, placed in the order of the four tones.

Here are some examples which show how the synonyms or near synonyms combine, e.g. A + B, A + C, and B + C:

华丽 **huáli** ‘splendid’ (华 **huá** ‘resplendent’, 丽 **lì** ‘charming’)
 美丽 **měilì** ‘beautiful’ (美 **měi** ‘beautiful’, 丽 **lì** ‘charming’)
 华美 **huáměi** ‘gorgeous’ (华 **huá** ‘resplendent’, 美 **měi** ‘beautiful’)

讥讽 **jīfěng** ‘to satirize’ (讥 **jī** ‘to mock’, 讽 **fěng** ‘to ridicule’)
 讥刺 **jīcì** ‘to deride’ (讥 **jī** ‘to mock’, 刺 **cì** ‘to taunt, to jab’)
 讽刺 **fěngcì** ‘to ridicule’ (讽 **fěng** ‘to ridicule’, 刺 **cì** ‘to taunt, to jab’)

错误 **cuòwù** ‘mistake’ (错 **cuò** ‘mistake’, 误 **wù** ‘miscalculation’)
 差错 **chācuò** ‘error’ (差 **chā** ‘discrepancy’, 错 **cuò** ‘mistake’)
 误差 **wùchā** ‘inaccuracy’ (误 **wù** ‘miscalculation’, 差 **chā** ‘discrepancy’)

Sometimes, these synonymous juxtapositions may multiply through mutual reference and combination, creating a considerable number of disyllabic synonyms, e.g.

丰 **fēng** ‘abundant’ 富 **fù** ‘rich’ 裕 **yù** ‘plenty’ 足 **zú** ‘sufficient’
 充 **chōng** ‘full’

丰富 **fēngfù** ‘abundant’
 富裕 **fùyù** ‘rich’
 丰裕 **fēngyù** ‘copious’
 丰足 **fēngzú** ‘plentiful’
 富足 **fùzú** ‘bountiful’
 充足 **chōngzú** ‘sufficient’
 充裕 **chōngyù** ‘ample’

Secondly, the word class of the component morphemes will usually determine the word class of the resultant juxtaposition.

Here are some examples from three major word categories:

- 城市 **chéngshì** 'city'⁸ (城 **chéng** 'town', 市 **shì** 'city')
 土地 **tǔdì** 'land' (土 **tǔ** 'earth', 地 **dì** 'land, ground')
 牙齿 **yáchǐ** 'tooth' (牙 **yá** 'incisor', 齿 **chǐ** 'molar')
 眼睛 **yǎnjīng** 'eye' (眼 **yǎn** 'eye', 睛 **jīng** 'eyeball')
 缝隙 **fèngxì** 'chink' (缝 **fèng** 'crevice', 隙 **xì** 'crack')
 服装 **fúzhuāng** 'clothing' (服 **fú** 'clothes', 装 **zhuāng** 'garments')
 气候 **qìhòu** 'climate' (气 **qì** 'atmospheric conditions', 候 **hòu** 'weather conditions')
 基础 **jīchǔ** 'foundation' (基 **jī** 'base', 础 **chǔ** 'plinth')
 了解 **liǎojiě** 'to understand, find out' (了 **liǎo** 'to know clearly', 解 **jiě** 'to comprehend')
 憎恨 **zēnghèn** 'to hate, to detest' (憎 **zēng** 'to loathe', 恨 **hèn** 'to resent')
 希望 **xīwàng** 'to hope' (希 **xī** 'to wish', 望 **wàng** 'to expect')
 保佑 **bǎoyòu** 'to bless' (保 **bǎo** 'to protect', 佑 **yòu** 'to bless')
 应该 **yīnggāi** 'should' (应 **yīng** 'must', 该 **gāi** 'ought to')
 必须 **bìxū** 'must' (必 **bì** 'need to', 须 **xū** 'have to')
 翻译 **fānyì** 'to translate' (翻 **fān** 'to turn into', 译 **yì** 'to translate')
 编辑 **biānjí** 'to edit' (编 **biān** 'to compile', 辑 **jí** 'to collect')
 阻拦 **zǔlán** 'to impede, hinder' (阻 **zǔ** 'to obstruct', 拦 **lán** 'to get in the way of')
 建筑 **jiànzhù** 'to construct' (建 **jiàn** 'to build', 筑 **zhù** 'to construct')
 茂盛 **màoshèng** 'luxuriant' (茂 **mào** 'profuse', 盛 **shèng** 'exuberant')
 贫穷 **pínqióng** 'poor' (贫 **pīn** 'impoverished', 穷 **qióng** 'poor')
 骄傲 **jiāo'ào** 'proud, conceited' (骄 **jiāo** 'arrogant', 傲 **ào** 'haughty')
 懒惰 **lǎnduò** 'lazy' (懒 **lǎn** 'lazy', 惰 **duò** 'lethargic, inert')
 吝啬 **lìnsè** 'stingy' (吝 **lìn** 'mean', 啬 **sè** 'miserly')
 惭愧 **cánkuì** 'ashamed' (惭 **cán** 'shamefaced', 愧 **kuì** 'abashed')
 潇洒 **xiāosǎ** 'unrestrained' (潇 **xiāo** '(of water) deep and clear', 洒 **sǎ** 'to sprinkle')
 虚伪 **xūwěi** 'hypocritical' (虚 **xū** 'empty', 伪 **wěi** 'false')
 奢侈 **shēchǐ** 'extravagant' (奢 **shē** 'luxurious', 侈 **chǐ** 'wasteful')
 勇敢 **yǒnggǎn** 'courageous' (勇 **yǒng** 'brave', 敢 **gǎn** 'daring')

⁸ This is a synchronic study, for in diachronic studies, the lexeme 城市 **chéngshì** might be understood to be composed of two co-hyponymic morphemes, i.e. 城 **chéng** 'city wall' and 市 **shì** 'city market'.

It is not difficult to see that synonymous juxtapositions are in fact mostly formed by juxtaposing lexemes or morphemes from adjacent semantic fields, as there are in fact no perfect synonyms in any language, e.g.

明澈 **míngchè** 'lucid, transparent' (明 **míng** 'bright', 澈 **chè** 'limpid')

干净 **gānjìng** 'clean' (干 **gān** 'dry', 净 **jìng** 'clean')

诚恳 **chéngkěn** 'sincere' (诚 **chéng** 'honest', 恳 **kěn** 'earnest')

安静 **ānjìng** 'quiet' (安 **ān** 'safe, peaceful', 静 **jìng** 'silent')

28.2.1.1.4 Apart from the three major types of semantic juxtaposition discussed above, there is a small number of verbal juxtapositions that can be called 'sequential juxtapositions', i.e. the action in the second verb can only place take when the action in the first verb has been carried out, e.g.

生息 **shēngxī** 'to propagate' (生 **shēng** 'to live', 息 **xī** 'to grow, multiply')

罗列 **luóliè** 'to list, enumerate' (罗 **luó** 'to net, collect', 列 **liè** 'to spread out, to line up')

赠阅 **zèngyuè** 'to give out as a complimentary copy' (赠 **zèng** 'to give as a present', 阅 **yuè** 'to read')

停留 **tíngliú** 'to stop over' (停 **tíng** 'to stop', 留 **liú** 'to stay')

叫卖 **jiàomài** 'to cry one's wares' (叫 **jiào** 'to cry, to shout', 卖 **mài** 'to sell')

停止 **tíngzhǐ** 'to stop, to cease' (停 **tíng** 'to stop', 止 **zhǐ** 'to come to a stop')

攻占 **gōngzhàn** 'to occupy, to capture' (攻 **gōng** 'to attack', 占 **zhàn** 'to occupy')

28.2.1.1.5 There is also another less common yet equally important juxtaposition in the lexicon, which may be called a 'phonetic compound'.⁹ These are synonymous juxtapositions, but the two component morphemes in most cases are virtually inseparable, with one seldom appearing without the other. You will also notice that some of the characters used in a phonetic compound (e.g. 参差 **cēncī**) are compound specific. That is to say, they occur only in that particular combination and may not be used elsewhere with the same pronunciation or meaning.

Phonetic compounds are alliterative, rhymed, reiterated or onomatopoeic. Alliterative and rhymed compounds are mostly adjectives or verbs, whereas reiterated compounds are essentially adverbs. Onomatopoeic compounds are used in their own formulaic way. For example,

⁹ These are called **liánmiáncí** 连绵词 or 联绵词 in Chinese, which are themselves a rhymed compound, composed of 连 **lián** 'linked' or 联 **lián** 'joined' and 绵 **mián** 'continuous'.

Alliterative compounds:

犹豫 **yóuyóu** 'to hesitate' (犹 **yóu** 'be uncertain', 豫 **yù** 'be indecisive')
 滴答 **dīda**¹⁰ 'to drip' (also onomatopoeic.)
 拮据 **jiéjū** 'hard up' (拮 **jié** 'in straitened circumstances',
 据 **jū** 'poverty-stricken')
 迷蒙 **míméng** 'perplexed' (迷 **mí** 'puzzled', 蒙 **méng** 'muddled')
 参差 **cēncī** 'uneven' (参 **cēn** 'irregular', 差 **cī** 'asymmetrical')
 琐碎 **suǒsuì** 'trivial' (琐 **suǒ** 'petty', 碎 **suì** 'fragmentary')

¹⁰ 滴答 **dīda** 'to drip' as a verb should be distinguished from its homophonous (and fully onomatopoeic) lexeme with two tonal morphemes 滴答 **dīdā** 'ticktock, pitter-patter'.

Rhymed compounds:

富裕 **fùyù** 'affluent' (富 **fù** 'rich', 裕 **yù** 'plentiful')
 暴躁 **bàozào** 'irascible' (暴 **bào** 'savage', 躁 **zào** 'short-tempered')
 苗条 **miáotiao** '(of body shape) slender' (苗 **miáo** 'seedling',
 条 **tiáo** 'a length of')
 婉转 **wǎnzhuǎn** 'tactful, discreet' (婉 **wǎn** 'indirect', 转 **zhuǎn**
 'to change')
 均匀 **jūnyún** 'even, equal' (均 **jūn** 'equal', 匀 **yún** 'even')
 祷告 **dǎogào** 'to pray' (祷 **dǎo** 'to pray', 告 **gào** 'to tell')
 侮辱 **wǔrǔ** 'to insult' (侮 **wǔ** 'to insult, bully', 辱 **rǔ** 'to disgrace,
 humiliate')
 荡漾 **dàngyàng** 'to undulate' (荡 **dàng** 'to sway', 漾 **yàng** 'to ripple')

It is not uncommon that in writing, some of these illiterated or rhymed compounds have a **graphemic semblance**, i.e. they share the same radical, e.g.

肮脏 **āngzāng** 'dirty' (肮 **āng** 'filthy', 脏 **zāng** 'dirty')
 慷慨 **kāngkǎi** 'generous' (慷 **kāng** 'magnanimous', 慨 **kǎi** 'free-handed')
 尴尬 **gāngà** 'embarrassed' (尴 **gān** 'mortified', 尬 **gà** 'ashamed')
 蹊跷 **qīqiāo** 'queer, fishy' (蹊 **qī** 'odd', 跷 **qiāo** 'strange')
 崎岖 **qíqū** 'uneven, bumpy' (崎 **qí** 'rugged', 岖 **qū** 'bumpy')
 瘫痪 **tānhuàn** 'paralyzed' (瘫 **tān** 'paralyzed', 痪 **huàn** 'incapacitated')
 踌躇 **chóuchú** 'shilly-shally' (踌 **chóu** 'to dither', 躇 **chú** 'to falter')
 徘徊 **páihuái** 'to linger, to hang about' (徘 **pái** 'to loiter', 徊 **huái**
 'to dawdle')
 匍匐 **púfú** 'to creep' (匍 **pú** 'to go on all fours', 匐 **fú** 'to go on hands
 and knees')
 怂恿 **sǒngyǐng** 'to instigate' (怂 **sǒng** 'to incite', 恿 **yǐng** 'to provoke')

Reiterated compounds:

默默 **mòmò** ‘quietly, silently’ as in 默默地工作 **mòmò de gōngzuò**
‘to work assiduously but quietly’

深深 **shēnshēn** ‘deeply’ as in 深深地爱上了她 **shēnshēn de ài**
shàng le tā ‘to be deeply in love with her’

天天 **tiāntiān** ‘every day’ as in 天天努力学习 **tiāntiān nǔlì xuéxí**
‘to study hard every day’

田田 **tiántián** ‘graceful’ as in 田田的荷叶 **tiántián de héyè**
‘graceful lotus leaves (on the surface of a pool)’

足足 **zú zú** ‘fully’ as in 足足两年 **zú zú liǎng nián** ‘fully two years’

Onomatopoeic compounds:

匡啷 **kuānglāng** ‘with a bang, with a crash’ as in 匡啷一声把门关上
kuānglāng yī shēng bǎ mén guān shàng ‘to bang the door shut’

扑通 **pūtōng** ‘with a splash’ as in 扑通一声掉进水里 **pūtōng yī**
shēng diào jìn shuǐ lǐ ‘to fall into the water with a splash’

咔嚓 **kāchā** ‘with a snap, crack’ as in 咔嚓一声树枝断了 **kāchā yī**
shēng shùzhī duàn le ‘with a crack the branch broke in two’

咯噔 **gēdēng** ‘clip-clop’ as in 咯噔咯噔的马蹄声 **gēdēng gēdēng de**
mǎtí shēng ‘the clip-clop of horses’ hooves’

吧唧 **bājī** ‘with a squelching sound’ as in 在泥地里吧唧吧唧地
向前走 **zài nídì lǐ bājī bājī de xiàng qián zǒu** ‘to squelch
along in the mud’

But most onomatopoeic compounds imitating human or animal sounds
adopt the form of reiterated compounds:

哈哈 **hāhā** ‘sound of loud laughter’ as in 哈哈大笑 **hāhā dàxiào**
‘to laugh heartily’

汪汪 **wāngwāng** ‘bowwow’ as in 狗汪汪地叫 **gǒu wāngwāng de**
jiào ‘a dog is barking’

咪咪 **mīmī** ‘(of cat) to mew, miaow’ as in 小猫咪咪叫 **xiǎo māo**
mīmī jiào ‘a kitten mews’

吱吱 **zīzī** ‘(of mouse) to squeak’ as in 老鼠在吱吱叫 **lǎoshǔ zài**
zhīzhī jiào ‘the mice are squeaking’

喔喔 **wōwō** ‘(of rooster) to crow’ as in 公鸡在喔喔地叫 **gōngjī zài**
wōwō de jiào ‘the cock is crowing’

咯咯 **gēgē** ‘(of hen) cluck’ as in 母鸡咯咯叫着 **mǔjī gēgē jiào zhe**
‘the hen is clucking’

Sometimes, similar sounds are couched in different graphemes or radicals for different contexts, e.g.

砰 **pēng** ‘thumping’ as in 砰砰砰的敲门声 **pēng pēng pēng de qiāo mén shēng** ‘somebody thumping on the door’
怦怦 **pēngpēng** ‘(of heart beat) pit-a-pat’ as in 她的心怦怦地乱跳 **tā de xīn pēngpēng de luàn tiào** ‘her heart goes pit-a-pat’
嘭 **pēng** ‘(of tyre, etc., bursting) bang’ as in 嘭的一声，车胎爆了 **pēng de yī shēng | chētāi bào le** ‘the tyre burst with a bang’

Please note that all onomatopoeic lexemes are pronounced in the first tone (i.e., a high level tone), and they are quite consistent in their syntactic behaviour.¹¹

¹¹ See the relevant section in this chapter.

28.2.2 *Modificational lexemes*

In a modificational lexeme, the first morpheme is a modifier and the second morpheme is the headword. The modifier may be a word or morpheme from all word categories. The headword is usually a noun, an adjective or a verb. The word class of the headword generally determines the word class of the resultant lexeme, but there are exceptions:

热心 **rèxīn** ‘adj. enthusiastic, v. to enthuse about’ has a noun headword 心 **xīn** ‘heart’, which is qualified by an adjective 热 **rè** ‘hot’, but the resultant word is used either as an adjective or as a verb. It is rarely used as a noun.
暴动 **bàodòng** (暴 **bào** ‘violent’, 动 **dòng** ‘to move’) with a verb headword is more often used as a noun meaning ‘riot’ rather than as a verb meaning ‘to stage a riot’.
亲身 **qīnshēn** ‘personally, in person’ (亲 **qīn** ‘closely related’, 身 **shēn** ‘body, self’) with a nominal head morpheme is only used as an adverb.

However, let us now look at the modifier–headword relationship as a whole. As a general rule, a modifier may either refine or define. A refining qualifier simply describes:

恒心 **héngxīn** ‘perseverance’ (恒 **héng** ‘constant, persistent’, 心 **xīn** ‘heart, mind’)
耐心 **nàixīn** ‘patience’ (耐 **nài** ‘to endure’)
信心 **xìnxīn** ‘confidence’ (信 **xìn** ‘to believe, to have faith in’)
疑心 **yíxīn** ‘suspicion’ (疑 **yí** ‘to suspect, to doubt’)

These four lexemes describe different states of mind, but they are not necessarily mutually related. The words themselves do not form a set of co-hyponyms.

If we extend the use of the second morpheme of the superordinate term 感情 **gǎnqíng** ‘feelings, emotion’ (感 **gǎn** ‘feeling’ and 情 **qíng** ‘sentiment’), we have the following co-hyponymic set:

- 爱情 **àiqíng** ‘love’ (爱 **ài** ‘to love’) between two lovers
- 友情 **yǒuqíng** ‘friendship’ (友 **yǒu** ‘friend’) between two intimate friends
- 交情 **jiāoqíng** ‘friendliness’ (交 **jiāo** ‘to contact, to associate with’) between two acquaintances
- 恩情 **ēnqíng** ‘feeling of gratitude’ (恩 **ēn** ‘debt of gratitude’) between a beneficiary and his/her benefactor

The nature of hyponymy may be even more clearly revealed if we focus on a more concrete headword or head morpheme like 蜂 **fēng**¹² ‘bee’:

- 蜜蜂 **mìfēng** ‘honeybee’ (蜜 **mì** ‘honey’)
- 马蜂 **mǎfēng** ‘hornet’ (马 **mǎ** ‘horse’)
- 熊蜂 **xióngfēng** ‘bumblebee’ (熊 **xióng** ‘bear’)
- 黄蜂 **huángfēng** ‘wasp’ (黄 **huáng** ‘brown, yellow’)

¹² 蜂 **fēng** is called a morpheme here because it is not a word and cannot be used on its own: *一只蜂 **yī zhī fēng** ‘a bee’.

From this set of ‘bee’ nouns, we can see that the headword or head morpheme represents a general category, which is then defined to represent a co-hyponymic subcategory by adding a defining epithet. The different epithets serve to differentiate between different categories of ‘bees’.

If we select the adjective 红 **hóng** ‘red’ as the headword, the modifiers we can attach to it are either nouns or adjectives:

- 鲜红 **xiānhóng** ‘scarlet’ (鲜 **xiān** ‘bright’)
- 朱红 **zhūhóng** ‘vermillion’ (朱 **zhū** ‘vermillion’)
- 枣红 **zǎohóng** ‘claret, dark red’ (枣 **zǎo** ‘jujube, dates’)
- 紫红 **zǐhóng** ‘purplish red’ (紫 **zǐ** ‘purple’)
- 粉红 **fěnhóng** ‘pink’ (粉 **fěn** ‘powder’)

The resultant lexemes form a co-hyponymic set that encodes different shades of redness.

If we look at another set of words organized around the head morpheme 觉 **jué** ‘to feel, to sense’, we can identify more clearly the two different roles a modifier plays in a modificational lexeme:

感觉 **gǎnjué**¹³ ‘sense; to sense’ (感 **gǎn** ‘to feel’)
 知觉 **zhījué** ‘consciousness’ (知 **zhī** ‘to know’)
 直觉 **zhíjué** ‘intuition’ (直 **zhí** ‘direct, straight’)
 幻觉 **huànjué** ‘hallucination’ (幻 **huàn** ‘illusory, unreal’)

¹³ 感觉 **gǎnjué** ‘sense’ may also be regarded as a juxtapositional lexeme, but it is perhaps more useful to regard it as a modificational lexeme here, as it contrasts with 知觉 **zhījué** ‘consciousness’.

From the above examples, we see that the head morpheme is being refined to produce lexemes describing various states of mind.

But in the following lexemes, we may clearly see their co-hyponymic relationships:

视觉 **shìjué** ‘sense of sight’ (视 **shì** ‘to see’)
 听觉 **tīngjué** ‘sense of hearing’ (听 **tīng** ‘to hear’)
 嗅觉 **xiùjué** ‘sense of smell’ (嗅 **xiù** ‘to smell’)
 味觉 **wèijué** ‘sense of taste’ (味 **wèi** ‘taste, flavour’)
 触觉 **chùjué** ‘sense of touch’ (触 **chù** ‘to touch’)

Then beyond the five senses we have:

色觉 **sèjué** ‘sense of colour’ (色 **sè** ‘colour’)
 温觉 **wēnjué** ‘sense of heat’ (温 **wēn** ‘temperature’)
 痛觉 **tòngjué** ‘sense of pain’ (痛 **tòng** ‘pain’)

色觉 **sèjué** (colour) clearly links with 视觉 **shìjué** (sight), being a hyponym further down the line, and the same relationship in part exists between 温觉 **wēnjué** (heat) and 痛觉 **tòngjué** (pain) and 触觉 **chùjué** (touch), though the modifiers are all restrictive in nature.

From the above, we can see that in a modificational lexeme there is a refining (i.e. descriptive) and defining (i.e. restrictive) distinction in the modifier. While the refining modifier describes, the defining modifier differentiates the headword or head morpheme into co-hyponymic sets.

In fact, there is also a superordinate and synecdochic distinction in the modified. While the superordinate term is often defined to form co-hyponymic sets, it may also turn itself into a modifier and produce a synecdochic set (in which the new headword or morpheme is semantically

either a part of the superordinate modifier or something materially or spatially related to it).

For instance, a superordinate term like 花 **huā** ‘flower, blossom’, which includes all the flowers and blossoms found in nature, can be used either as a headword defined by another morpheme to form a co-hyponymic set, or as a modifier to define another word or morpheme to produce a synecdochic set:

花 **huā** ‘flower, blossom’ as a headword producing two hyponymic sets:

菊花 **júhuā** ‘chrysanthemum’

兰花 **lánhuā** ‘orchid’

玫瑰花 **méiguīhuā** ‘rose’

桃花 **táohuā** ‘peach blossom’

樱花 **yīnghuā** ‘cherry blossom’

木兰花 **mùlánhuā** ‘magnolia’

花 **huā** as a modifier or epithet that producing two further synecdochic sets:

花瓣 **huābàn** ‘flower petal’

花蕾 **huālěi** ‘flower bud’

花梗 **huāgěng** ‘flower stalk’

花瓶 **huāpíng** ‘vase’ (瓶 **píng** short for 瓶子 **píngzi** ‘bottle’)

花篮 **huālán** ‘flower basket’ (篮 **lán** short for 篮子 **lánzi** ‘basket’)

花环 **huāhuán** ‘wreath, garland’ (环 **huán** ‘loop’)

Postpositions in Chinese, as we know, are a specific set of spatial or positional nouns, which are more often used in their abbreviated forms. In syntactic constructions, they are generally delimited by a superordinate term of which they are a part:

床上 **chuáng shàng** ‘in bed, on the bed’

床下 **chuáng xià** ‘under the bed’

床前 **chuáng qián** ‘in front of the bed’

户外 **hù wài** ‘outdoor’ as in 户外活动 **hù wài huódòng** ‘outdoor activities’

家里 **jiā li** ‘home’ as in 在家里 **zài jiā li** ‘to be at home, to be in’

桌子旁边 **zhuōzi pángbiān** ‘by the table, at the table’

饭后 **fàn hòu** ‘after the meal’

睡前 **shuì qián** ‘before going to bed’

The above examples are freely coined syntactic constructions. Established lexemes include such words as:

早上 **zǎoshang** '(in the) morning' (早 **zǎo** 'n. morning, adj. early')
 晚上 **wǎnshang** '(in the) evening' (晚 **wǎn** 'n. evening, adj. late')
 午后 **wǔhòu** 'afternoon' (午 **wǔ** 'noon, midday')
 事前 **shìqián** 'beforehand' (事 **shì** 'event, incident')
 课外 **kèwài** 'after school, extracurricular' (课 **kè** 'lesson, class')
 室内 **shìnnèi** 'interior, indoor' (室 **shì** 'room')
 空中 **kōngzhōng** 'in the sky, in the air' (空 **kōng** 'sky, air')
 心里 **xīnli** 'at heart' (心 **xīn** 'heart')

Modificational constructions often use antonymous modifiers and/or modified to produce or imply dichotomies:

常客 **chángkè** 'regular customer' (常 **cháng** 'frequent', 客 **kè** 'visitor')
 散客 **sǎnkè** 'walk-in customer' (散 **sǎn** 'loose, scattered', 客 **kè** 'visitor')
 主角 **zhǔjué** 'leading actor/actress' (主 **zhǔ** 'main', 角 **jué** 'role')
 配角 **pèijué** 'supporting role' (配 **pèi** 'to match', 角 **jué** 'role')
 乐观 **lèguān** 'optimistic' (乐 **lè** 'happy', 观 **guān** 'prospect')
 悲观 **bēiguān** 'pessimistic' (悲 **bēi** 'sad', 观 **guān** 'prospect')
 粗心 **cūxīn** 'careless' (粗 **cū** 'thick; careless', 心 **xīn** 'heart')
 细心 **xìxīn** 'careful, cautious' (细 **xì** 'thin; careful', 心 **xīn** 'heart')
 优点 **yōudiǎn** 'merit' (优 **yōu** 'satisfactory', 点 **diǎn** 'point')
 缺点 **quēdiǎn** 'defect, shortcoming' (缺 **quē** 'imperfect', 点 **diǎn** 'point')
 新式 **xīnshì** 'fashionable' (新 **xīn** 'new', 式 **shì** 'pattern')
 老式 **lǎoshì** 'old-fashioned' (老 **lǎo** 'old', 式 **shì** 'pattern')
 好吃 **hǎochī** 'tasty, delicious' (好 **hǎo** 'good', 吃 **chī** 'to eat')
 难吃 **nánchī** 'unpalatable' (难 **nán** 'difficult', 吃 **chī** 'to eat')
 全面 **quánmiàn** 'all-round, comprehensive' (全 **quán** 'complete',
 面 **miàn** 'face, side')
 片面 **piànmiàn** 'lopsided, one-sided' (片 **piàn** 'one-sided; partial',
 面 **miàn** 'face, side')
 全部 **quánbù** 'whole, entire' (全 **quán** 'complete', 部 **bù** 'portion')
 局部 **júbù** 'part' (局 **jú** 'part', 部 **bù** 'portion')
 前进 **qiánjìn** 'to advance' (前 **qián** 'front', 进 **jìn** 'to go forward')
 后退 **hòutui** 'to retreat' (后 **hòu** 'back', 退 **tuì** 'to go backward')

分工 **fēngōng** 'to share the work' (分 **fēn** 'to divide up',
工 **gōng** 'work')
合作 **hézuò** 'to collaborate' (合 **hé** 'to combine', 作 **zuò** 'job')
主要 **zhǔyào** 'primary' (主 **zhǔ** 'main', 要 **yào** 'importance')
次要 **cìyào** 'secondary' (次 **cì** 'second', 要 **yào** 'importance')

In the structure of modificational lexemes, there is also one type of modifier that works like a degree adverb built into a disyllabic lexeme, where the headword or head morpheme is usually an adjective or occasionally a verb. This is the refining function of the modifier seen at its purest. The resultant lexemes generally serve as either attributives or complements in macrosyntactic constructions, e.g.

粉碎 **fěnsuì** '(to shatter into) smithereens' (粉 **fěn** 'powder',
碎 **suì** 'smashed')
稀烂 **xīlàn** 'mashed, broken to bits' (稀 **xī** 'watery', 烂 **làn** 'pulpy')
雪白 **xuěbái** 'snow-white' (雪 **xuě** 'snow', 白 **bái** 'white')
漆黑 **qīhēi** 'pitch-black' (漆 **qī** 'paint', 黑 **hēi** 'black')
碧绿 **bìlǜ** 'dark green' (碧 **bì** 'jade', 绿 **lǜ** 'green')
喷香 **pènxiāng** 'extremely fragrant, delicious' (喷 **pèn** '(of smell)
strong', 香 **xiāng** 'fragrant')
绷脆 **bèngcuì** 'very crisp' (绷 **bèng** 'very', 脆 **cuì** 'crispy')
滚烫 **gǔntàng** 'scalding' (滚 **gǔn** 'boiling, to boil', 烫 **tàng** 'boiling hot')
透湿 **tòushī** 'drenched' (透 **tòu** 'thorough', 湿 **shī** 'wet')
崭新 **zhǎnxīn** 'brand new' (崭 **zhǎn** 'especially', 新 **xīn** 'new')
笔直 **bǐzhí** 'perfectly straight' (笔 **bǐ** 'pen', 直 **zhí** 'straight')
泥醉 **nízùi** 'dead drunk' (泥 **ní** 'mud', 醉 **zùi** 'drunk')
奇丑 **qíchǒu** 'terribly ugly' (奇 **qí** 'strangely', 丑 **chǒu** 'ugly')
绝妙 **juémào** 'superb' (绝 **jué** 'utmost', 妙 **miào** 'ingenious')

Another set of adverb-like modifiers delimits exclusively a verbal headword or head morpheme and implies plurality, e.g.

相爱 **xiāng'ài** 'to love each other' (相 **xiāng** 'mutually', 爱 **ài** 'to love')
合作 **hézuò** 'to collaborate' (合 **hé** 'together', 作 **zuò** 'to do')
对立 **duìlì** 'to oppose (one another)' (对 **duì** 'opposite', 立 **lì** 'to stand')
同居 **tóngjū** 'to cohabit' (同 **tóng** 'together', 居 **jū** 'to live')
重叠 **chóngdié** 'to overlap, adj. overlapping' (重 **chóng** 'to duplicate',
叠 **dié** 'to pile up')
交流 **jiāoliú** 'to exchange (ideas, experience)' (交 **jiāo** 'reciprocal',
流 **liú** 'to flow')

分享 **fēnxiǎng** 'to share (the fruits of)' (分 **fēn** 'to divide', 享 **xiǎng** 'to enjoy')

会议 **huìyì** 'meeting, conference' (会 **huì** 'to meet', 议 **yì** 'to discuss')

In most cases, such an adverb-like modifier can be so versatile and productive in the formation of a disyllabic modificational lexeme that it may almost be regarded as a prefix:

相处 **xiāngchǔ** 'to get along (with)' (相 **xiāng** 'mutually', 处 **chǔ** 'to get along (with)')

相逢 **xiāngféng** 'to bump into, to come across' (逢 **féng** 'to meet')

相撞 **xiāngzhuàng** 'to collide' (撞 **zhuàng** 'to run into')

相比 **xiāngbǐ** 'to compare with' (比 **bǐ** 'to compare')

相似 **xiāngsì** 'to resemble' (似 **sì** 'to be similar to')

相等 **xiāngděng** 'to be equal (to)' (等 **děng** 'to be equal')

相差 **xiāngchà** 'to differ (from)' (差 **chà** 'to differ')

In some cases, when the modifier becomes the modified, it behaves almost like a suffix:

汇合 **huìhé** 'to join, converge' (汇 **huì** 'to converge', 合 **hé** 'to combine')

配合 **pèihé** 'to coordinate' (配 **pèi** 'to match')

联合 **liánhé** 'to unite (with), ally (with)' (联 **lián** 'to unite, ally (with)')

集合 **jíhé** 'to assemble, gather' (集 **jí** 'to gather, come together')

吻合 **wěnhé** 'to tally with' (吻 **wěn** 'to kiss')

混合 **hùnhé** 'to mix, blend (together)' (混 **hùn** 'to mix')

化合 **huàhé** '(to undergo) a chemical combination' (化 **huà** 'to change, transform')

28.2.3 Predicational lexemes

A predicational lexeme is a 'noun + verb' structure. The relationship between the noun and the verb can be threefold.

It can be a 'subject + predicate/predicative' relationship, i.e. the noun in the subject position either initiates the action in the verb or possesses the traits indicated by the adjectival predicative. Below are three sets of examples:

地震 **dìzhèn** 'earthquake' (地 **dì** 'land', 震 **zhèn** 'to tremble, shake')

雪崩 **xuěbēng** 'avalanche' (雪 **xuě** 'snow', 崩 **bēng** 'to collapse, tumble down')

海啸 **hǎixiào** 'tsunami' (海 **hǎi** 'sea, ocean', 啸 **xiào** 'to roar')

雷击 **léijī** 'to be struck by lightning' (雷 **léi** 'thunder', 击 **jī** 'to strike')
 月蚀 **yuèshí** 'eclipse of the moon' (月 **yuè** 'the moon', 蚀 **shí** 'to erode')
 天亮 **tiānliàng** 'daybreak' (天 **tiān** 'sky', 亮 **liàng** 'bright')
 海拔 **hǎibá** 'elevation, height above sea level' (海 **hǎi** 'sea, ocean',
 拔 **bá** 'to pull, lift')
 坡降 **pōjiàng** 'slope' (坡 **pō** 'slope', 降 **jiàng** 'to drop, descend')
 头晕 **tóuyūn** 'dizzy' (头 **tóu** 'head', 晕 **yūn** 'to swoon, faint')
 耳背 **ěrbèi** 'hard of hearing' (耳 **ěr** 'ear', 背 **bèi** 'hard of hearing')
 心悸 **xīnjī** 'palpitation; to palpitate' (心 **xīn** 'heart', 悸 **jì** 'to throb')
 胃痛 **wèitòng** 'stomach ache' (胃 **wèi** 'stomach', 痛 **tòng** 'to ache')
 食积 **shíjī** 'indigestion' (食 **shí** 'food', 积 **jī** 'indigestion; to accumulate')
 眼尖 **yǎnjiān** 'sharp-eyed' (眼 **yǎn** 'eye', 尖 **jiān** 'sharp, pointed')
 嘴馋 **zuǐchán** 'greedy, glutinous' (嘴 **zuǐ** 'mouth', 馋 **chán** 'greedy')
 手痒 **shǒuyǎng** 'to have an itch to do something' (手 **shǒu** 'hand',
 痒 **yǎng** 'to itch, itchy')
 口吃 **kǒuchī** 'to stutter, stammer' (口 **kǒu** 'mouth', 吃 **chī** 'to eat')

The first set is nouns about natural disasters or phenomena. The second relates to human illnesses or physical conditions. Both these sets can be adjectives as well as nouns. The third set consists of adjectives indicating human physical or psychological traits or characteristics.

These 'subject + verb' predicational lexemes can also produce commonly used adjectives, nouns and verbs across a wide range of meanings beyond the three groups mentioned above:

人造 **rénzào** 'artificial' (人 **rén** 'human', 造 **zào** 'to make')
 天然 **tiānrán** 'natural' (天 **tiān** 'heaven', 然 **rán** 'to be so, like that')
 国产 **guóchǎn** 'domestic; products of a country' (国 **guó** 'state, country', 产 **chǎn** 'to produce')
 肤浅 **fūqiǎn** 'superficial' (肤 **fū** 'skin', 浅 **qiǎn** 'shallow')¹⁴
 心虚 **xīnxū** 'self-doubting, unsure' (心 **xīn** 'heart', 虚 **xū** 'timid, diffident')
 政治 **zhèngzhì** 'politics' (政 **zhèng** 'government', 治 **zhì** 'to rule')
 条约 **tiáoyuē** 'treaty' (条 **tiáo** 'clause, item', 约 **yuē** 'to restrain, bind')
 刑罚 **xíngfá** 'punishment, penalty' (刑 **xíng** 'to torture; punishment',
 罚 **fá** 'to punish')
 内容 **nèiróng** 'content, contents' (内 **nèi** 'interior', 容 **róng** 'to contain, hold')
 例如 **lìrú** 'for example' (例 **lì** 'example', 如 **rú** 'to be like, similar to')

¹⁴ 浮浅 **fúqiǎn** 'shallow, superficial' is similar in meaning to 肤浅 **fūqiǎn** but is of a juxtapositional type.

自由 **zìyóu** 'freedom' (自 **zì** 'self', 由 **yóu** 'to do as one pleases')
 自动 **zìdòng** 'automatic' (动 **dòng** 'to move')
 自私 **zìsī** 'selfish' (私 **sī** 'private')
 自满 **zìmǎn** 'self-satisfied' (满 **mǎn** 'to be satisfied')
 自信 **zìxìn** 'self-confidence' (信 **xìn** 'to believe')
 自学 **zìxué** 'self-study' (学 **xué** 'to study')
 自助 **zìzhù** 'self-service' (助 **zhù** 'to help')
 自主 **zìzhǔ** 'to decide for oneself' (主 **zhǔ** 'to decide')
 自卫 **zìwèi** 'self-defence' (卫 **wèi** 'to defend')
 自杀 **zìshā** 'to commit suicide' (杀 **shā** 'to kill')

However, the relationship between the noun and the verb can sometimes semantically take the form of 'instrument + action'. The instrument may include parts of the human body or anything in the physical or psychological world:

膝行 **xīxíng** 'to crawl on one's knees' (膝 **xī** 'knee', 行 **xíng** 'to go')
 怀抱 **huáibào** 'to cherish' (怀 **huái** 'bosom', 抱 **bào** 'to embrace')
 舌战 **shézhàn** 'to argue vehemently' (舌 **shé** 'tongue', 战 **zhàn** 'to fight, to do battle')
 臂助 **bìzhù** 'to help' (臂 **bì** 'arm', 助 **zhù** 'help')
 口授 **kǒushòu** 'to dictate (e.g. a letter)' (口 **kǒu** 'mouth', 授 **shòu** 'to instruct')
 口服 **kǒufú** 'to take (medicine) orally' (口 **kǒu** 'mouth', 服 **fú** 'to take (medicine)')
 目睹 **mùdǔ** 'to witness, to see with one's own eyes' (目 **mù** 'eye', 睹 **dǔ** 'to see')
 力求 **lìqiú** 'to strive for' (力 **lì** 'effort, strength', 求 **qiú** 'to seek, aim at')
 名列 **míngliè** 'to rank amongst' (名 **míng** 'name', 列 **liè** 'to list, be on a list') as in 名列第一 **míngliè dìyī** 'to come out as number one'
 盆栽 **pénzāi** 'to cultivate in a pot; potted plant, bonsai' (盆 **pén** 'pot', 栽 **zāi** 'to grow, plant')
 笔记 **bǐjì** 'notes' (笔 **bǐ** 'pen', 记 **jì** 'to write down, record')
 粉刷 **fěnsuā** 'to whitewash' (粉 **fěn** 'powder', 刷 **shuā** 'to brush')
 药检 **yàojiǎn** 'drug test' (药 **yào** 'medicine', 检 **jiǎn** 'to check, test')
 红烧 **hóngshāo** '(Chinese cuisine) to braise in soy sauce' (红 **hóng** 'red – the colour that metonymically represents soy sauce', 烧 **shāo** 'to cook, braise')
 食疗 **shíliáo** 'food therapy' (食 **shí** 'food', 疗 **liáo** 'to treat, cure')
 梦想 **mèngxiǎng** 'dream, aspiration; to dream, aspire' (梦 **mèng** 'dream', 想 **xiǎng** 'to think, hope')

目录 **mùlù** 'table of contents, catalogue' (目 **mù** 'item', 录 **lù** 'to record')
火葬 **huǒzàng** 'cremation' (火 **huǒ** 'fire', 葬 **zàng** 'to bury')

Sometimes, the noun can be a metaphorical vehicle that refers to the tenor of the macrosyntactic structure:

囊括 **nángkuò** 'to embrace, include' (囊 **náng** 'pocket, bag', 括 **kuò** 'to include') as in 囊括所有金牌 **nángkuò suǒyǒu jīnpái** 'to bag all the gold medals'

席卷 **xíjuǎn** 'to sweep across' (席 **xí** 'mat', 卷 **juǎn** 'to roll, sweep across') as in 席卷全球 **xíjuǎn quánqiú** 'to sweep across the whole world'

梭巡 **suōxún** 'to patrol' (梭 **suō** 'shuttle', 巡 **xún** 'to patrol')

团结 **tuánjié** 'to unite' (团 **tuán** 'a group, organisation', 结 **jié** 'to tie, link up')

影射 **yǐngshè** 'to insinuate, hint at' (影 **yǐng** 'shadow', 射 **shè** 'to shoot')

雷同 **léitóng** 'to duplicate' (雷 **léi** 'thunder', 同 **tóng** 'to echo, to be similar')

云集 **yúnjí** 'to congregate' (云 **yún** 'cloud', 集 **jí** 'to gather')

星散 **xīngsàn** 'to disperse' (星 **xīng** 'star', 散 **sàn** 'to scatter')

瓜分 **guāfēn** 'to divide up, carve up' (瓜 **guā** 'melon', 分 **fēn** 'to divide')

蔓延 **mànyán** 'to spread' (蔓 **màn** 'tendrils, vines', 延 **yán** 'to extend')

树立 **shùlì** 'to set up, establish' (树 **shù** 'tree', 立 **lì** 'to stand') as in 树立榜样 **shùlì bǎngyàng** 'to set an example'

根绝 **gēnjué** 'to root out, eradicate' (根 **gēn** 'roots', 绝 **jué** 'to sever')

雀跃 **quèyuè** 'to jump for joy' (雀 **què** 'sparrow', 跃 **yuè** 'to jump')

鸟瞰 **niǎokàn** 'to have a bird's eye view' (鸟 **niǎo** 'bird', 瞰 **kàn** 'to look down from a height')

蜂拥 **fēngyōng** 'to swarm (round)' (蜂 **fēng** 'bee', 拥 **yōng** 'to gather round, throng')

鲸吞 **jīngtūn** 'to annex (territory)' (鲸 **jīng** 'whale', 吞 **tūn** 'to swallow')

蚕食 **cánshí** 'to nibble, encroach upon' (蚕 **cán** 'silkworm', 食 **shí** 'to eat')

From the above three sets of examples, we can see that the metaphorical vehicle used may be anything in the natural or artificial world. The metaphor can in fact be recaptured in a simile format: e.g. 瓜分 **guāfēn** 'to divide up something like cutting up a melon', 蔓延 **mànyán** 'to spread across a large area like tendrils or vines', and 鸟瞰 **niǎokàn** 'to look down from a height like a bird', and so on.

Some predication lexemes derive from historical or literary backgrounds, e.g.

瓜代 **guādài** ‘to replace someone in office’ (瓜 **guā** ‘melon’, here used metonymically to represent the time when the melons are ripe. The story goes that in the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC) two generals who guarded the frontiers were promised by the duke that they would be replaced as soon as the melons were ripe, 代 **dài** ‘to replace’)

符合 **fúhé** ‘to tally with’ (符 **fú** ‘a tally, half of which was given by the emperor, for example, to a general on a military campaign as his credentials with the other half being kept at court’, 合 **hé** ‘to match’)

Overall, predication lexemes (apart from those coined with 自 **zì** ‘self’ as the micro-lexemic subject) are not the most versatile word-formation device in Chinese morphology, and existing lexemes formed through predication are limited in number in the whole of the lexicon.

28.2.4 Governmental lexemes

A governmental lexeme is syntactically a ‘verb + object’ structure. Semantically speaking, however, the relationship between the verb and its object can be varied and manifold¹⁵.

¹⁵ See the chapter on intralingual transpositions.

Let us first consider two verbs and the range of objects they can take:

停 **tíng** ‘to stop, to cease’ with a noun object:

停车 **tíngchē** ‘to pull up’ (车 **chē** ‘car’)

停电 **tíngdiàn** ‘to have a power cut/blackout’ (电 **diàn** ‘electricity’)

停工 **tínggōng** ‘to stop work, close down’ (工 **gōng** ‘work’)

停火 **tíng huǒ** ‘to cease fire’ (火 **huǒ** ‘fire, gunfire’)

停课 **tíngkè** ‘to suspend classes’ (课 **kè** ‘lesson’)

停业 **tíngyè** ‘to go out of business, close down’ (业 **yè** ‘enterprise’)

停职 **tíngzhí** ‘to suspend somebody from office’ (职 **zhí** ‘job, occupation’)

停 **tíng** with a verb object, which functions as a gerund or verbal noun:

停办 **tíngbàn** ‘to close down’ (办 **bàn** ‘to manage, to run’)

停产 **tíngchǎn** ‘to stop production’ (产 **chǎn** ‘to produce’)

停飞 **tíngfēi** ‘to ground aircraft’ (飞 **fēi** ‘to fly’)

停刊 **tíngkān** ‘to stop publication (of a magazine, newspaper etc)’
(刊 **kān** ‘to publish’)

停赛 **tíngsài** ‘to disqualify an athlete’ (赛 **sài** ‘to compete’)

停学 **tíngxué** ‘to drop out; to suspend from school’ (学 **xué** ‘to study’)

停战 **tíngzhàn** ‘to stop fighting, cease hostilities’ (战 **zhàn** ‘to fight’)

着 **zháo**¹⁶ ‘to be affected by’, mostly with an adjectival object:

着慌 **zháohuāng** ‘to be nervous’ (慌 **huāng** ‘scared’)

着急 **zháojí** ‘to be anxious’ (急 **jí** ‘anxious’)

着忙 **zháománg** ‘to be in a hurry’ (忙 **máng** ‘busy’)

着迷 **zháomí** ‘to be captivated’ (迷 **mí** ‘to be fascinated by’)

着魔 **zháomó** ‘to be bewitched’ (魔 **mó** ‘demon, devil’)

着恼 **zháonǎo** ‘to be vexed’ (恼 **nǎo** ‘angry, annoyed’)

着凉 **zháliáng** ‘to catch cold’ (凉 **liáng** ‘cold’)

¹⁶ 着 **zháo** ‘to become’ is to be differentiated from its homograph 着 **zhuó** ‘to touch, to apply’ as in 着陆 **zhuólù** ‘(of a plane) to come in to land’, 着手 **zhuóshǒu** ‘to set about doing something’, 着想 **zhuóxiǎng** ‘to consider the interests of’, etc.

In contrast, a number of verbs can be associated with a particular object, e.g. 款 **kuǎn** ‘money’:

汇款 **huìkuǎn** ‘to remit money (to somebody)’ (汇 **huì** ‘to remit’)

存款 **cúunkuǎn** ‘to deposit money (in a bank)’ (存 **cún** ‘to deposit’)

拨款 **bōkuǎn** ‘to allocate funds to’ (拨 **bō** ‘to allot’)

罚款 **fákǎn** ‘to fine’ (罚 **fá** ‘to punish’)

捐款 **juānkuǎn** ‘to donate’ (捐 **juān** ‘to donate’)

贷款 **dàikuǎn** ‘to provide a loan, make an advance to’ (贷 **dài** ‘to loan’)

Governmental lexemes rank next to juxtapositional lexemes in their number and versatility. The verbal morphemes in a governmental lexeme may take objects of all word classes, and their meaning relationship with the latter may vary extensively¹⁷.

¹⁷ Please refer to the chapter on interlingual conversions.

Let us look further at lexical governmental constructions, and in particular how they may function as a predicate in macrosyntax.

Chinese syntax is more prone to active voice forms than passive, and it is natural to find notional passive structures like 这种手机卖完了 **zhèi zhǒng shǒujī mài wán le** ‘This kind of mobile phone has sold out’, and lexicalized passives like 逃犯被捕了 **táofàn bèibǔ le** ‘The convict on the run has been arrested’.

There are quite a few similar passive lexicalizations in the lexicon. We shall list only a few of them here:

- 遭殃 **zāoyāng** 'to meet with disaster'
 受灾 **shòuzāi** 'to be hit by a natural calamity'
 罹难 **línàn** 'to die in an accident; to be murdered'
 招祸 **zhāohuò** 'to court disaster'
 蒙冤 **méngyuān** 'to be wronged'
 挨饿 **ái'è** 'to suffer from hunger'
 遇险 **yùxiǎn** 'to run into danger'
 中弹 **zhòngdàn** 'to be shot'
 着凉 **zháoliáng** 'to catch cold'
 得病 **débing** 'to become ill'
 吃亏 **chīkuī** 'to suffer loss'
 上当 **shàngdàng** 'to be fooled, taken in'

In one or two cases like 罹难 **línàn**, the verbal morpheme might become collocationally specific, but, generally speaking, most of the verbal morphemes may collocate with a number of objects. Here are a few examples linked with 吃 **chī**, 得 **dé** and 受 **shòu**:

- 吃惊 **chījīng** 'to be startled'
 吃苦 **chīkǔ** 'to bear hardship'
 得奖 **déjiǎng** 'to win a prize'
 得救 **déjiù** 'to be saved'
 受潮 **shòucháo** 'to be affected by damp and cold'
 受挫 **shòucuò** 'to be thwarted, baffled'
 受罚 **shòufá** 'to be punished'
 受伤 **shòushāng** 'to be injured'
 受骗 **shòupiàn** 'to be deceived'

Governmental constructions often encode daily life situations:

- 做工¹⁸ **zuògōng** 'to work, do manual work'
 务农 **wùnóng** 'to farm, be a farmer'
 经商 **jīngshāng** 'to engage in trade, be in business'
 任教 **rènjiào** 'to be a teacher, hold a teaching post'
 行医 **xíngyī** 'to practise medicine'
 参军 **cānjūn** 'to enlist, join the army'

¹⁸ Many of these words may also be couched in phrases in macrosyntax, e.g. 当工人/农民/老师/医生/兵/和尚/尼姑 **dāng gōngrén/nóngmín/lǎoshī/yīshēng/bīng/héshang/nígū**, etc. One may of course say 当商人 **dāng shāngrén**, but it is more common to say 做生意 **zuò shēngyì**.

从政 **cóngzhèng** 'to be engaged in politics'
 当官 **dāngguān** 'to be an official, magistrate'
 出家 **chūjiā** 'to become a monk, nun'

Also:

吃饭 **chīfàn** 'to eat'
 睡觉 **shuìjiào** 'to sleep'
 起床 **qǐchuáng** 'to get up (from bed)'
 刷牙 **shuāyá** 'to brush one's teeth'
 洗脸 **xǐliǎn** 'to wash one's face'
 梳头 **shūtóu** 'to comb one's hair'
 上班 **shàngbān** 'to go to work'
 上学 **shàngxué** 'to go to school, attend school'
 喝茶 **hēchá** 'to drink tea'
 买菜 **mǎicài** 'to buy food, vegetables'
 理发 **lǐfā** 'to have a haircut'
 坐车 **zuòchē** 'to go by car, bus, etc.'
 看戏 **kànxì** 'to go to the theatre'
 唱歌 **chànggē** 'to sing'
 跳舞 **tiàowǔ** 'to dance'
 游泳 **yóuyǒng** 'to swim'
 跑步 **pǎobù** 'to go for a run, to jog'
 健身 **jiànshēn** 'to keep fit'

And, more fundamentally,

打嗝 **dǎgé** 'to belch'
 拉屎 **lāshǐ** 'to move the bowels, shit'
 撒尿 **sāniào** 'to pee, piss'
 放屁 **fàngpì** 'to break wind, fart'

Governmental constructions are also used to encode dichotomies or triple correlations:

开幕 **kāimù** 'to inaugurate, open (a conference, etc); to raise the curtain' (开 **kāi** 'to open', 幕 **mù** 'curtain')
 闭幕 **bì mù** 'to close, conclude (a conference, etc); to lower the curtain, the curtain falls' (闭 **bì** 'to close')
 上课 **shàngkè** 'to attend, go to class' (上 **shàng** 'to go to', 课 **kè** 'lesson')
 下课 **xiàkè** 'to finish (class, lessons)' (下 **xià** 'to leave, finish')
 上班 **shàngbān** 'to go to work' (班 **bān** 'shift, duty')
 下班 **xiàbān** 'to go off, finish work'

上学 **shàngxué** 'to go to, attend school' (学 **xué** 'school')
 放学 **fàngxué** 'to finish school' (放 **fàng** 'to dismiss, let out')
 开会 **kāihuì** 'to hold, start, attend a meeting' (开 **kāi** 'to open',
 会 **huì** 'meeting')
 休会 **xiūhuì** 'to adjourn a meeting' (休 **xiū** 'to rest, stop temporarily')
 散会 **sànhuì** 'to end, conclude a meeting' (散 **sàn** 'to disperse')
 订婚 **dìnghūn** 'to be engaged' (订 **dìng** 'to agree on', 婚 **hūn** 'marriage')
 结婚 **jiéhūn** 'to get married' (结 **jié** 'to tie')
 离婚 **líhūn** 'to get divorced' (离 **lí** 'to separate')

28.2.5 *Complemental lexemes*

Complemental lexemes like governmental lexemes are also verb centred. They consist of a verbal morpheme followed by a complement rather than an object, i.e. 'V + C' instead of 'V + O'.

The complements here consist of an adjective such as 干 **gān** 'dry', or a verb that indicates result such as 断 **duàn** 'to break', or a directional marker used figuratively such as 上 **shàng** 'to get into a certain state'.

This construction is versatile and it is sometimes almost impossible to distinguish between existing lexemes in the lexicon and ad hoc constructions. For instance, as a complement, 干 **gān** 'dry' can express dryness achieved in a number of different ways, depending on the verb accompanying it:

晒干 **shàigān** 'to dry in the sun'
 晾干 **liànggān** 'to dry in the air, hang out to dry'
 吹干 **chuīgān** 'to dry by blowing'
 阴干 **yīngān** 'to dry in the shade'
 风干 **fēnggān** 'to dry in the wind'
 烘干 **hōnggān** 'to dry over/by a fire'

All the above can be found in the lexicon, but an ad hoc lexeme like the following can be coined:

熨干 **yùngān** 'to make something dry with an iron' (熨 **yùn** 'to iron, press' as in 熨斗 **yùndǒu** 'an iron')

With the verb 断 **duàn** 'to break' as the complement, the following are in the lexicon:

切断 **qiēduàn** 'to cut, slice in two, using a vertical force'
 截断 **jiéduàn** 'to cut off with great force; to block; to interrupt'

割断 **gēduàn** 'to sever, cut off, using a horizontal force'

熔断 **róngduàn** 'to blow a fuse'

But equally feasible, though outside the lexicon, would be:

压断 **yāduàn** 'to break through vertical pressure'

剪断 **jiǎnduàn** 'to cut with scissors'

砍断 **kǎnduàn** 'to hack, chop off'

One verbal morpheme can also through its action lead to many results;

撕破 **sīpò** 'to tear up' (破 **pò** 'torn')

撕碎 **sīsui** 'to tear to pieces' (碎 **suì** 'in pieces')

撕裂 **sīliè** 'to tear apart' (裂 **liè** 'split')

撕开 **sīkāi** 'to tear open' (开 **kāi** 'open')

撕下 **sīxià** 'to tear down' (下 **xià** 'down')

撕掉 **sīdiào** 'to tear off' (掉 **diào** 'off, away, down')

In some cases, an exact complement in the lexicon cannot be found, and a general word that indicates a favourable result like 好 **hǎo** 'good' is used:

穿好 **chuānhǎo** 'to put on properly (clothes, shoes, etc)'

戴好 **dàihǎo** 'to put on properly (hat, cap, glasses, gloves, jewellery, etc)'

包好 **bāohǎo** 'to wrap up properly'

放好 **fànghǎo** 'to put away safely'

坐好 **zuòhǎo** 'to take one's seat, sit in one's place'

Similarly, a verbal morpheme like 弄 **nòng** or 搞 **gǎo** is used to convey a general meaning:

弄好 **nònghǎo** 'to do well, finish doing'

搞好 **gǎohǎo** 'to do well, do a good job'

with their opposites being:

弄坏 **nònghuài** 'to break, damage, ruin'

搞坏 **gǎohuài** 'to break, damage, ruin'

These two general verbs may in fact be used to replace all the verbs in complemental lexemes if the bad result in the complement is accidental and the good deliberate:

弄破 **nòngpò** 'to smash'

弄断 **nòngduàn** 'to break'

弄丢 **nòngdiū** 'to lose'

弄干 **nònggān** 'to dry'

弄湿 **nòngshī** 'to make wet/damp'

搞糟 **gǎozāo** 'to foul up'
搞臭 **gǎochòu** 'to discredit'
搞混 **gǎohùn** 'to mix up'
搞砸 **gǎozá** 'to bungle, fail'
搞清楚 **gǎo qīngchǔ** 'to make clear'

However in established complemental lexemes, the verb and the result are usually logically related, with a specific verbal morpheme being coupled with a specific result morpheme. Here are a number of these dichotomies:

提前 **tíqián** 'to bring forward, advance (in time)'
推迟 **tuīchí** 'to postpone, defer'
降低 **jiàngdī** 'to reduce, cut down'
提高 **tígāo** 'to raise'
增多 **zēngduō** 'to increase'
减少 **jiǎnshǎo** 'to reduce, decrease'
延长 **yáncháng** 'to lengthen, extend'
缩短 **suōduǎn** 'to shorten, curtail'
更新 **gēngxīn** 'to renew, replace'
复旧 **fùjiù** 'to restore, revive'
加快 **jiākuài** 'to accelerate, speed up'
放慢 **fàngmàn** 'to slow down'
抓紧 **zhuājǐn** 'to grasp firmly'
放松 **fàngsōng** 'to loosen, relax'
扩大 **kuòdà** 'to expand, enlarge'
缩小 **suōxiǎo** 'to reduce, to shrink'

The pattern here is logical. When you 'increase' (增 **zēng**), the result will of course be 'more' (多 **duō**); and when you 'reduce' (减 **jiǎn**), the result will be 'less' (少 **shǎo**).

Apart from adjectives and specific verbs that can function as complements in a complemental lexeme, words indicating direction, e.g. 上 **shàng** 'up, above, on', as we pointed out earlier, may also be used figuratively in these combinations:

上 **shàng** can convey two meanings. Firstly, it indicates that something has been properly done or achieved due to ability, competence, etc:

考上(大学) **kǎoshàng (dàxué)** 'to pass (the university) entrance examination'
当上(选手) **dāngshàng (xuǎnshǒu)** 'to be selected (as a player/contestant in sport)'
锁上门 **suǒshàng mén** 'to lock the door'

关上窗 **guānshàng chuāng** 'to shut the window'

赶上(尾班车/末班车) **gǎnshàng (wěibānchē/mòbānchē)** 'to catch the last bus'

吃上(荔枝) **chīshàng (lìzhī)** 'to have the chance/opportunity to eat (lychees)'

Secondly, it means to do or start something in spite of oneself:

爱上(她) **àishàng (tā)** 'to fall in love with (her)'

染上(伊波拉) **rǎnshàng (yībōlā)** 'to catch (Ebola)'

碰上(机会) **pèngshàng (jīhuì)** 'to come across (an opportunity)'

28.3 Syntactically oriented trisyllabic lexemes and expressions

In addition to disyllabic lexemes, there are also trisyllabic lexemes in the lexicon, which can be analyzed syntactically. Here are two sets of examples:

传染病 **chuánrǎnbìng** 'contagious disease' (传染 **chuánrǎn** 'to infect' + 病 **bìng** 'disease')

高利贷 **gāolìdài** 'usury, usurious loan' (高 **gāo** 'high', 利 **lì** 'interest' + 贷 **dài** 'loan')

流浪汉 **liúlànghàn** 'tramp, vagrant' (流浪 **liúlàng** 'to wander, roam, lead a vagrant life' + 汉 **hàn** 'man')

心理学 **xīnlǐxué** 'psychology' (心理 **xīnlǐ** 'mentality' + 学 **xué** 'study')

喷水池 **pēnshuǐchí** 'fountain' (喷 **pēn** 'to spurt, spout', 水 **shuǐ** 'water' + 池 **chí** 'pool')

办公室 **bàngōngshì** 'office' (办公 **bàngōng** 'to deal with public business, work' + 室 **shì** 'room')

大使馆 **dàshǐguǎn** 'embassy' (大使 **dàshǐ** 'ambassador' + 馆 **guǎn** 'building')

老百姓 **lǎobǎixìng** 'ordinary people, civilians' (老 **lǎo** 'old' + 百 **bǎi** 'hundred', 姓 **xìng** 'surname')

后花园 **hòuhuāyuán** 'back garden' (后 **hòu** 'at the back' + 花园 **huāyuán** 'flower garden')

性骚扰 **xìngsāorǎo** 'sexual harassment' (性 **xìng** 'sex' + 骚扰 **sāorǎo** 'to harass')

厚脸皮 **hòuliǎnpí** 'cheeky, thick-skinned' (厚 **hòu** 'thick' + 脸 **liǎn** 'face', 皮 **pí** 'skin')

半中间 **bànzhōngjiān** 'halfway' (半 **bàn** 'half' + 中间 **zhōngjiān** 'middle')

脑震荡 **nǎozhèndàng** 'cerebral concussion' (脑 **nǎo** 'brain',
震荡 **zhèndàng** 'to shake, shock')

By applying immediate constituent analysis, we can see that the examples in the first set consist of a '2 + 1' syntactic structure (i.e. a disyllabic lexeme modifying a monosyllabic headword or head morpheme), while the second is a '1 + 2' syntactic structure (i.e. a monosyllabic word or morpheme modifying a disyllabic headword), though prosodically speaking, they are both expressed in speech with a '2 + 1' rhythm.

There are also a considerable number of adjectives and a smaller number of nouns in the lexicon that are followed by, or are complemented by, a reduplicated phonaestheme, e.g.

甜丝丝 **tiánsīsī** 'pleasantly sweet' (甜 **tián** 'sweet' + 丝丝 **sīsī**)

酸溜溜 **suānliūliū** 'sourish, tart; (fig.) envious' (酸 **suān** 'sour' +
溜溜 **liūliū**)

香喷喷 **xiāngpēnpēn** 'aromatic, fragrant, sweet-smelling' (香 **xiāng**
'sweet-smelling' + 喷喷 **pēnpēn**)

臭呼呼 **chòuhūhū** 'stinking, smelly' (臭 **chòu** 'foul, stinking' +
呼呼 **hūhū**)

湿淋淋 **shīlīnlīn** 'dripping wet, drenched' (湿 **shī** 'wet' + 淋淋 **līnlīn**)

干巴巴 **gānbābā** 'dry, arid; (fig.) boring' (干 **gān** 'dry' + 巴巴 **bābā**)

亮晶晶 **liàngjīngjīng** 'glittering, glistening, sparkling' (亮 **liàng** 'bright' +
晶晶 **jīngjīng**)

黑黢黢 **hēiqūqū** 'pitch-black' (黑 **hēi** 'black' + 黢黢 **qūqū**)

脏兮兮 **zāngxīxī** 'dirty, filthy' (脏 **zāng** 'dirty' + 兮兮 **xīxī**)

清凌凌 **qīnglínglíng** 'crystal clear' (清 **qīng** 'clear' + 凌凌 **línglíng**)

轰隆隆 **hōnglōnglōng** 'rumbling' (轰 **hōng** 'to boom, to rumble' +
隆隆 **lōnglōng**)

闹嚷嚷 **nàorāngrāng** 'noisy, cacophonous' (闹 **nào** 'to make a noise'
+ 嚷嚷 **rāngrāng**)

冷清清 **lěngqīngqīng** 'desolate, cold and desolate' (冷 **lěng** 'cold' +
清清 **qīngqīng**)

静悄悄 **jìngqiāoqiāo** 'very quiet, quietly' (静 **jìng** 'quiet' +
悄悄 **qiāoqiāo**)

慢腾腾 **màntēngtēng** 'unhurried' (慢 **màn** 'slow' + 腾腾 **tēngtēng**)

密匝匝 **mìzāzā** 'dense' (密 **mì** 'dense' + 匝匝 **zāzā**)

光秃秃 **guāngtūtū** 'bare, naked, bald' (光 **guāng** 'bare' + 秃秃 **tūtū**)

硬邦邦 **yìngbāngbāng** 'firm, rigid, inflexible' (硬 **yìng** 'hard' +
邦邦 **bāngbāng**)

沉甸甸 **chéndiāndiān** 'heavy' (沉 **chén** 'heavy' + 甸甸 **diāndiān**)

轻飘飘 **qīngpiāopiāo** 'buoyant' (轻 **qīng** 'light' + 飘飘 **piāopiāo**)

冷冰冰 **lěngbīngbīng** 'cold, icy; (fig.) apathetic' (冷 **lěng** 'cold' + 冰冰 **bīngbīng**)

热烘烘 **rèhōnghōng** 'very warm' (热 **rè** 'hot' + 烘烘 **hōnghōng**)

活生生 **huóshēngshēng** 'real, living' (活 **huó** 'alive' + 生生 **shēngshēng**)

顶呱呱 **dǐngguāguā** 'tip-top, first-rate' (顶 **dǐng** 'top, peak' + 呱呱 **guāguā**)

喜洋洋 **xǐyángyáng** 'beaming with joy' (喜 **xǐ** 'happy' + 洋洋 **yángyáng**)

孤零零 **gūlínglíng** 'all alone, solitary' (孤 **gū** 'alone' + 零零 **línglíng**)

亮晃晃 **liànghuǎnghuǎng** 'glittering, dazzling' (亮 **liàng** 'bright' + 晃晃 **huǎnghuǎng**)

空荡荡 **kōngdàngdàng** 'deserted' (空 **kōng** 'empty' + 荡荡 **dàngdàng**)

眼睁睁 **yǎnzhēngzhēng** '(looking on) helplessly' (眼 **yǎn** 'eye' + 睁睁 **zhēngzhēng**)

泪汪汪 **lèiwāngwāng** 'tearful' (泪 **lèi** 'tears' + 汪汪 **wāngwāng**)

汗津津 **hànjīnjīn** 'sweaty' (汗 **hàn** 'sweat' + 津津 **hànjīnjīn**)

兴冲冲 **xìngchōngchōng** 'jubilantly, excitedly' (兴 **xìng** 'spirit, excitement' + 冲冲 **chōngchōng**)

气吁吁 **qìxūxū** 'breathlessly, panting' (气 **qì** 'breath' + 吁吁 **xūxū**)

In some cases, the phonaesthemes are suffixable to a number of adjectives:

暖洋洋 **nuǎnyángyáng** 'warm and snug' (暖 **nuǎn** 'warm' + 洋洋 **yángyáng**)

懒洋洋 **lǎnyángyáng** 'languid, sluggish' (懒 **lǎn** 'lazy, sluggish' + 洋洋 **yángyáng**)

热呼呼 **rèhūhū** 'warm' (热 **rè** 'hot' + 呼呼 **hūhū**)

气呼呼 **qìhūhū** 'panting with rage' (气 **qì** 'anger' + 呼呼 **hūhū**)

These adjectival or adverbial lexemes, as we can see, generally appeal to the senses. This is especially apparent in colour adjectives:

红彤彤 **hōngtōngtōng** 'bright red' (红 **hōng** 'red' + 彤彤 **tōngtōng**)

黄澄澄 **huángdēngdēng** 'glistening yellow' (黄 **huáng** 'yellow' + 澄澄 **dēngdēng**)

金晃晃 **jīnhuānghuāng** 'golden' (金 **jīn** 'golden' + 晃晃 **huānghuāng**)

蓝盈盈 **lánīngyīng** 'shiny blue' (蓝 **lán** 'blue' + 盈盈 **yīngyīng**)

绿茸茸 **lǜrōngrōng** 'lush green' (绿 **lǜ** 'green' + 茸茸 **rōngrōng**)

碧油油 **bìyōuyōu** 'bluish/bright green' (碧 **bì** 'bluish green' + 油油 **yōuyōu**)

白茫茫 **báimángmáng** 'boundless white' (白 **bái** 'white' + 茫茫 **mángmáng**)

灰溜溜 **huīliūliū** 'gloomy' (灰 **huī** 'grey' + 溜溜 **liūliū**)

The trisyllabic lexemes with the '2 + 1' syntactic pattern are far more numerous than those with the '1 + 2' pattern. The former structure is the hallmark of trisyllabic nouns, whereas the latter is usually employed to encode phonaesthetic adjectives and trisyllabic set expressions or vernacular idioms:

(1) set expressions or collocations:

动不动 **dòngbudòng** 'at every turn, at the least provocation'
(动 **dòng** 'to move' + 不动 **budòng** 'not to move')

as in 动不动就发脾气 **dòngbudòng jiù fā píqì** 'to lose one's temper at the slightest provocation' (发 **fā** 'to vent', 脾气 **píqì** 'temper')

来不及 **láibují** 'not to have time to do something' (来 **lái** 'to do something' + 不及 **bují** 'to not be in time')

as in 来不及吃早饭了 **láibují chī zǎofàn le** 'don't have time to have breakfast' (吃 **chī** 'to eat' + 早饭 **zǎofàn** 'breakfast')

巴不得 **bābude** 'eager to, be only too anxious to' (巴 **bā** 'to expect anxiously, hope earnestly', 不得 **bude** 'not attain, cannot')

as in 巴不得马上去旅行 **bābude mǎshàng qù lǚxíng** 'be eager to go travelling at once'

满以为 **mǎn yǐwéi** 'to firmly believe, count on' (满 **mǎn** 'completely, entirely', 以为 **yǐwéi** 'to believe')

as in 满以为他昨天会来找我 **mǎn yǐwéi tā zuótiān huì lái zhǎo wǒ** '(I) was sure he would come and see me yesterday'

再也不 **zài yě bù** 'not again, no more' (再 **zài** 'again', 也 **yě** 'also', 不 **bù** 'not')

as in 下回再也不敢了 **xià huí zài yě bù gǎn le** 'dare not do it ever again'

一眨眼 **yī zhǎyǎn** 'in the twinkling of an eye' (一 **yī** 'one', 眨眼 **zhǎyǎn** 'to blink')

as in 一眨眼就不见了 **yī zhǎyǎn jiù bùjiàn le** 'disappear in the twinkling of an eye'

不好使 **bù hǎoshǐ** 'not functioning properly, not easy to use' (不 **bù** 'not', 好使 **hǎoshǐ** 'convenient to use')

as in 这支毛笔不好使。 **zhèi zhī máobǐ bù hǎoshǐ** 'This brush is difficult to use.'

靠得住 **kàodezhù** ‘reliable’ (靠 **kào** ‘to rely on’, 得住 **dezhù** ‘be able to do, settle, fix’)

as in 这个人靠得住。 **zhèi ge rén kàodezhù** ‘This fellow is reliable.’

天晓得 **tiān xiǎode** ‘heaven knows’ (天 **tiān** ‘heaven’, 晓得 **xiǎode** ‘to know’) is self-sufficient and can be used on its own or followed by a clause.

(2) vernacular idioms:

上西天 **shàng xītiān** ‘to die’ (上 **shàng** ‘to go to’ + 西天 **xītiān** ‘the (Buddhist) Western Paradise’) (西 **xī** ‘west’, 天 **tiān** ‘heaven’)

碰钉子 **pèng dīngzi** ‘to be met with a rebuff’ (碰 **pèng** ‘to bump against’, 钉子 **dīngzi** ‘nail’)

滚雪球 **gǔn xuěqiú** ‘to produce a snowball effect’ (滚 **gǔn** ‘to roll’ + 雪球 **xuěqiú** ‘snowball’)

闹肚子 **nào dùzi** ‘to have diarrhoea’ (闹 **nào** ‘to suffer from, to be troubled by’, 肚子 **dùzi** ‘belly’)

找岔子 **zhǎo chàzi** ‘to find fault with, be fussy’ (找 **zhǎo** ‘to find’, 岔子 **chàzi** ‘flaws’)

耍无赖 **shuǎ wúlài** ‘to act shamelessly, create a scene’ (耍 **shuǎ** ‘to play’, 无赖 **wúlài** ‘villain, rogue’)

和稀泥 **huò xīní** ‘to paper things over, gloss over’ (和 **huò** ‘to mix’, 稀泥 **xīní** ‘slush’)

As can be seen, the first morpheme of these vernacular idioms is more often than not a monosyllabic verb. These idioms are generally used as predicates.

28.4 Syntactically oriented quadrisyllabic (or multisyllabic) words, expressions and idioms

28.4.1 Quadrisyllabic (or multisyllabic) words and expressions

Quadrisyllabic (or multisyllabic) words and expressions are limited generally to a small number of technical terms in areas such as politics, economics, science, etc. Obvious examples would be 社会主义 **shèhuìzhǔyì** ‘socialism’, 微生物学 **wēishēngwùxué** ‘microbiology’, 现实主义 **xiànrshízhǔyì** ‘realism’, 电脑终端机 **diànnǎo zhōngduānjī** ‘computer terminal’, etc. We will not discuss them here.

Quadrissyllabic expressions worth mentioning, however, are a group of juxtaposed items taking a '1 + 1 + 1 + 1' or '1 + 1 + 2' form, listing a sequence of co-hyponyms. Since they are established lexemic items in the lexicon, they are grouped together here for reference:

柴米油盐 **chái mǐ yóu yán** 'daily necessities' (柴 **chái** 'firewood' + 米 **mǐ** 'rice' + 油 **yóu** 'oil' + 盐 **yán** 'salt'). Sometimes, this quadrissyllabic expression is extended to seven syllables to include 酱 **jiàng** 'soy sauce', 醋 **cù** 'vinegar', 茶 **chá** 'tea'.

衣食住行 **yī shí zhù xíng** 'basic necessities in life' (衣 **yī** 'clothing', 食 **shí** 'food', 住 **zhù** 'accommodation', 行 **xíng** 'transport')

老弱病残 **lǎo ruò bìng cán** 'the old, weak, sick and disabled' (老 **lǎo** 'old' + 弱 **ruò** 'weak' + 病 **bìng** 'ill' + 残 **cán** 'handicapped'). 孕 **yùn** 'pregnant' can be added here to form a five-syllable expression.

喜怒哀乐 **xǐ nù āi lè** 'the whole gamut of human emotions' (喜 **xǐ** 'happy', 怒 **nù** 'angry', 哀 **āi** 'sad', 乐 **lè** 'joyful, ecstatic')

金银财宝 **jīn yín cái bǎo** 'valuables' (金 **jīn** 'gold', 银 **yín** 'silver', 财 **cái** 'money', 宝 **bǎo** 'jewellery')

吃喝玩乐 **chī hē wǎn lè** 'eat, drink and be merry, beer and skittles' (吃 **chī** 'to eat', 喝 **hē** 'to drink', 玩 **wǎn** 'to play', 乐 **lè** 'to be merry')

望闻问切 **wàng wén wèn qiè** 'four basic methods of diagnosis in Chinese medicine' (望 **wàng** 'to observe (complexion, tongue, etc)', 闻 **wén** 'to listen to or smell (voice, breath, etc)', 问 **wèn** 'to ask about (symptoms, medical history, etc)', 切 **qiè** 'to feel the pulse etc')

As can be seen, these juxtaposed morphemes may be nouns, adjectives or verbs.

Examples of the 1 + 1 + 2 are:

日月星辰 **rì yuè xīngchén** 'heavenly bodies' (日 **rì** 'the sun', 月 **yuè** 'the moon', 星辰 **xīngchén** 'stars')

桌椅板凳 **zhuō yǐ bǎndèng** 'furniture' (桌 **zhuō** 'table', 椅 **yǐ** 'chair', 板凳 **bǎndèng** 'wooden bench')

In exceptional cases, the juxtaposition can go on to more than four items:

吃喝拉撒睡 **chī hē lā sā shuì** 'daily routine' (吃 **chī** 'to eat', 喝 **hē** 'to drink', 拉 **lā** 'to shit', 撒 **sā** 'to piss', 睡 **shuì** 'to sleep'. Note that 拉 **lā** here is shortened from 拉屎 **lāshǐ** 'to move the bowels' and 撒 **sā** from 撒尿 **sāniào** 'to pass water')

红橙黄绿蓝靛紫 **hóng chéng huáng lǜ lán diàn zǐ** ‘the spectrum of colours (as seen through a prism or rainbow)’ (红 **hóng** ‘red’, 橙 **chéng** ‘orange’, 黄 **huáng** ‘yellow’, 绿 **lǜ** ‘green’, 蓝 **lán** ‘blue’, 靛 **diàn** ‘indigo’, 紫 **zǐ** ‘violet’)

28.4.2 *Quadrisyllabic idioms*

Established quadrisyllabic items in the lexicon are mainly idioms from classical Chinese. They are a linguistic link with the past, reflecting the more concise nature of the classical language, and they provide the structure for many of the aphorisms which are a constant presence in Chinese speech and writing.

These quadrisyllabic idioms may assume a parallel or continuous pattern. By a parallel pattern, we mean the juxtaposing of two disyllabic structures of any of the five micro-syntactic lexical types we have so far identified. As far as a continuous pattern is concerned, it may follow any syntactic construction in the language, sometimes with the aid of such words as 而 **ér** ‘but’, 如 **rú** ‘as, like’, 欲 **yù** ‘be about to’, etc. as space-fillers as long as the idiom is confined to four syllables. Whatever the syntactic construction, the prosody of the idiom remains a ‘2 + 2’ rhythm like its parallel counterpart.

Below are examples of the parallel pattern:

(1) Juxtapositional disyllabic constructions:

成败利钝 **chéng bài lì dùn** ‘success or failure, sink or swim’
(成 **chéng** ‘success’, 败 **bài** ‘failure’ + 利 **lì** ‘sharp’, 钝 **dùn** ‘blunt’)

来回来去 **lái huí lái qù** ‘over and over again’ (来 **lái** ‘to come’, 回 **huí** ‘to return’, 去 **qù** ‘to go’)

(2) Modificational disyllabic constructions:

大惊小怪 **dà jīng xiǎo guài** ‘to make an unwarranted fuss’ (大 **dà** ‘big’, 惊 **jīng** ‘alarmed’ + 小 **xiǎo** ‘small’, 怪 **guài** ‘surprised’)

七嘴八舌 **qī zuǐ bā shé** ‘everyone trying to put in a word, talking all at the same time’ (七 **qī** ‘seven’, 嘴 **zuǐ** ‘mouth’ + 八 **bā** ‘eight’, 舌 **shé** ‘tongue’)

(3) Predicational constructions:

天怒人怨 **tiān nù rén yuàn** ‘(lit. heaven is angry and people complain) widespread discontent’ (天 **tiān** ‘heaven’, 怒 **nù** ‘angry’ + 人 **rén** ‘people’, 怨 **yuàn** ‘to complain’)

货真价实 **huò zhēn jià shí** 'through and through, out and out'
(货 **huò** 'commodity', 真 **zhēn** 'genuine' + 价 **jià** 'price',
实 **shí** 'reasonable')

(4) Governmental 'verb + object' constructions:

杜门谢客 **dù mén xiè kè** 'to close one's door to visitors,
live in seclusion' (杜 **dù** 'to close', 门 **mén** 'door' + 谢 **xiè**
'to decline', 客 **kè** 'guest')

登峰造极 **dēng fēng zào jí** 'to reach the zenith, reach
perfection' (登 **dēng** 'to ascend', 峰 **fēng** 'peak' + 造 **zào**
'to arrive at', 极 **jí** 'apex, extremity')

(5) Two complemental constructions:

吃饱喝足 **chī bǎo hē zú** '(lit. eat fill drink sufficient) to eat and
drink one's fill' (吃 **chī** 'to eat', 饱 **bǎo** 'full' + 喝 **hē** 'to drink',
足 **zú** 'sufficient')

起早摸黑 **qǐ zǎo mō hēi** 'to work from dawn till dusk, rise early
and work till late' (起 **qǐ** 'to get up', 早 **zǎo** 'early', 摸 **mō**
'to grope', 黑 **hēi** 'dark, black')

Here are some examples of the continuous pattern, with the syntactic arrangement indicated beneath each one:

猫哭老鼠 **māo kū lǎoshǔ** 'to shed crocodile tears' (猫 **māo** 'cat',
哭 **kū** 'to cry (over)', 老鼠 **lǎoshǔ** '(dead) mouse')

A complete SVO structure, where S = cat, V = to cry over and
O = mouse.

名不副实 **míng bù fù shí** 'more in name than reality' (名 **míng**
'name, fame', 不 **bù** 'not', 副 **fù** (= 符 **fú**) 'to match, to tally with',
实 **shí** 'reality, fact')

Another SVO structure with a negator, where S = fame, negator =
not, V = to match and O = fact.

下不为例 **xià bù wéi lì** 'not to be taken as a precedent' (下 **xià**
'next time', 不 **bù** 'not', 为 **wéi** 'to be taken as', 例 **lì** 'example')

An adverbial phrase ('next time') negator ('not') modifying a verb
phrase ('to be taken as a precedent'). The topic is of course
understood.

一丘之貉 **yī qiū zhī hé** 'birds of a feather' (一 **yī** 'one', 丘 **qiū**
'mound', 之 **zhī** a classical word equivalent to 的 **de**, 貉 **hé** 'badger')

A noun phrase meaning 'badgers from the same mound', which is the
equivalent of 'birds of a feather' in English.

如影随形 **rú yǐng suí xíng** 'inseparable, closely associated with each other – as the shadow follows the shape' (如 **rú** 'to be similar to', 影 **yǐng** 'shadow', 随 **suí** 'to follow', 形 **xíng** 'form, shape')

A coverbal phrase ('like the shadow') modifying a VO structure ('to follow the form').

了无倦意 **liǎowú juànyì** 'not at all tired' (了无 **liǎowú** 'entirely without', 倦意 **juànyì** 'hint of tiredness, drowsiness')

An adjectival phrase ('entirely without') qualifying a noun phrase ('hint of tiredness').

大海捞针 **dà hǎi lāo zhēn** 'to look for a needle in a haystack' (大 **dà** 'big', 海 **hǎi** 'sea', 捞 **lāo** 'to dredge, scoop up', 针 **zhēn** 'needle')

A location phrase ('in the wide ocean') modifying a VO structure ('to scoop up a needle').

绞尽脑汁 **jiǎo jìn nǎozhī** 'to rack one's brains' (绞 **jiǎo** 'to wring', 尽 **jìn** 'to the limit', 脑汁 **nǎozhī** 'brains')

A verb ('to wring') followed by a complement ('to the limit') and then a noun object ('brain juice').

迎刃而解 **yíng rèn ér jiě** '(of a problem) to be readily solved' (迎 **yíng** 'to meet, to come into contact with', 刃 **rèn** 'the blade of a knife', 而 **ér** 'and then', 解 **jiě** 'to split, come apart')

A coverbal phrase ('coming into contact with a blade') followed by monosyllabic verb ('to split or come apart') with the conjunctive 而 **ér** interposed.

There are many syntactic combinatory possibilities in quadrisyllabic idioms. We hope that the diverse set of examples we have given should be able to illustrate our point.

Quadrisyllabic idioms are mostly found in semantic domains relating to the human psyche and physique or to personal endeavours and social interactions. Similar to lexemes, they may be literal or metaphorical.

As we have seen, these quadrisyllabic classical idioms are a major (and consistent) feature of the Chinese lexicon. They are used and reused regularly in speech or writing, and rather than sounding clichéd, they are refreshing and invigorating to native speakers.

The syntactic behaviour of these quadrisyllabic idioms will be fully discussed in the next chapter, Morphology and Syntax (II).

28.5 Syntactically oriented multisyllabic sayings

Other idioms range from five syllables, six syllables, seven syllables, and more. They are either parallel or continuous constructions. There are many such idioms, but here are a few examples, beginning with the numeral 'one' — *yī*:

- 物降一物 *yī wù xiáng yī wù* 'everything has its nemesis' (一 *yī* 'one', 物 *wù* 'thing, being, entity', 降 *xiáng* 'to conquer, defeat')
- 一言以蔽之 *yī yán yǐ bì zhī* 'to put it in a nutshell' (一 *yī* 'one', 言 *yán* 'word, phrase', 以 *yǐ* 'by means of it', 蔽 *bì* 'to cover, sum up', 之 *zhī* 'it, i.e. what has just been said')
- 死了百债 *yī sǐ liǎo bǎi zhài* 'death pays all debts' (一 *yī* 'as soon as', 死 *sǐ* 'to die', 了 *liǎo* 'to bring to an end', 百 *bǎi* 'hundred', 债 *zhài* 'debt')
- 一步一个脚印 *yī bù yī ge jiǎoyìn* 'one step at a time, to make steady progress' (一 *yī* 'one', 步 *bù* 'step', 个 *gè* 'measure word, footprint', 脚印 *jiǎoyìn* 'footprint')
- 蟹不如一蟹 *yí xiè bù rú yí xiè* 'each one worse than the last — one crab is worse than another' (一 *yī* 'one', 蟹 *xiè* 'crab', 不 *bù* 'not', 如 *rú* 'to measure up to')
- 失足成千古恨 *yī shīzú chéng qiāngǔ hèn* 'one false step brings everlasting regret' (一 *yī* 'once', 失足 *shīzú* 'to lose one's footing', 成 *chéng* 'to become', 千古 *qiāngǔ* 'eternal', 恨 *hèn* 'remorse')

Parallelism is a feature of these multisyllabic sayings:

- 一寸光阴一寸金 *yī cùn guāngyīn yī cùn jīn* 'time is precious' (一 *yī* 'one', 寸 *cùn* 'Chinese inch', 光阴 *guāngyīn* 'time', 金 *jīn* 'gold'). To emphasize the value of time, the saying is often coupled with another seven-syllabled saying: 寸金难买寸光阴 *cùn jīn nán mǎi cùn guāngyīn* 'time is more valuable than gold' (难 *nán* 'difficult', 买 *mǎi* 'to buy')
- 回生，二回熟 *yī huí shēng | èr huí shú* '(lit. first time clumsy, second time skilful) difficult at first but easy later, everything is difficult before it becomes easy' (一 *yī* 'first', 回 *huí* 'time', 生 *shēng* 'unfamiliar', 二 *èr* 'second', 熟 *shú* 'familiar') A parallel English idiom would be 'practice makes perfect'.
- 一分钱一分货 *yī fēn qián yī fēn huò* 'value for money' (一 *yī* 'one', 分 *fēn* 'cent', 钱 *qián* 'money', 货 *huò* 'commodity')

一分耕耘，一分收获 **yī fēn gēngyún | yī fēn shōuhuò** ‘as a man sows, so he shall reap’ (一 **yī** ‘one’, 分 **fēn** ‘fraction, percentage’, 耕耘 **gēngyún** ‘to cultivate’, 收获 **shōuhuò** ‘to harvest’)

一个唱红脸，一个唱白脸 **yī ge chàng hóngliǎn | yī ge chàng báiliǎn** ‘lit. one sings/performs the red face role and one the white face role) one coaxes and the other coerces’ (一 **yī** ‘one’, 个 **gè** measure word here for a person, 唱 **chàng** ‘to sing’, 红脸 **hóngliǎn** ‘the red facial make-up of a hero in the traditional Chinese opera’, and 白脸 **báiliǎn** ‘the white make-up of a villain’)

一个篱笆三个桩，一个好汉三个帮 **yī ge líba sān ge zhuāng | yī ge hǎohàn sān ge bāng** ‘(lit. one fence three stakes, one hero three helps) everybody needs help from others’ (一 **yī** ‘one’, 个 **gè** measure word, 篱笆 **líba** ‘fence’, 三 **sān** ‘three’, 桩 **zhuāng** ‘stake, prop’, 好汉 **hǎohàn** ‘hero, brave man’, 帮 **bāng** ‘to help’)

Morphology and syntax (II)

In this second part of Morphology and Syntax, we shall first review the sentential formulation devices in Chinese syntax and then discuss in detail the syntactic behaviour of each type of syntactically oriented lexeme and idiom as outlined in Morphology and Syntax (I) in its macrosyntactic environment.

29.1 Sentential formulation devices

Chinese syntax does not resort to any inflections, declensions or conjugations to establish the relationship between the individual words or items that form syntactic configurations, but it essentially relies on two things: word order and a set of grammatical words.

29.1.1 SVO word order

The fundamental **SVO** sequence or word order is the basic pattern for a sentential unit in Chinese.

S and **O** in the equation may often be omitted, as they may be readily retrieved from the context or cotext in which they appear.

V is at the heart of the equation and is rarely abbreviated (except in the case of exclamations like 你! *nǐ* 'You!' or questions like 谁? *shéi* 'Who?'). In a contextualised exchange, it often happens that everything is omitted apart from the verb:

你要吗? *nǐ yào ma* (lit. you want *ma*) Do you want it/them/any?
要。 *yào* (lit. want) Yes.

你不去了吧? **nǐ bù qù le ba** (lit. you not go **le ba**) You aren't going, are you?

去。 **qù** (lit. go) Yes (I am).

Even when the verb is omitted in a conventional response, its presence is implied. Take this possible exchange between a host and a guest:

再要点儿吧? **zài yào diǎnr ba** (lit. again want a little **ba**) Have a little more.

不了, 谢谢。 **bú le | xièxie** (lit. no **le**. thanks) No, thank you.

再喝点儿吧? **zài hē diǎnr ba** (lit. again drink a little **ba**) Have a little more.

不了, 谢谢。 **bù le | xièxie** (lit. no **le**. thanks) No thank you.

The two different tones of 不 **bú** and **bù** used in the answers indicate that the speaker is taking account of the tones of the absent verbs 要 **yào** and 喝 **hē**.

One can of course build on this SVO skeletal framework by adding an attributive (A), adverbial (Ad) or complement (C).

An A will always be associated with a nominal or nominalized item (N), usually immediately before it (or on rare occasions immediately after it when a poetic or lyrical sense is being conveyed). As S and O are always realized by N, an A is therefore most likely to appear in their vicinity, giving us a modified construction of SVO in the form of

[(A) S] V [(A) O]

[(初升的) 太阳] 照耀着 [(广阔的) 原野]

chūshēng de tàiyáng zhàoyào zhe guǎngkuò de yuányě

[(rising **de**) sun] illuminate **zhe** [(vast **de**) country]

The rising sun illuminates the vast country.

An Ad will generally occur before a V and rarely after it. It may take the form of an adverb, a modal verb, a coverbal phrase and sometimes a verbal phrase with the verb suffixed by 着 **zhe**. The modified form will then look like

[(A) S] [(Ad) V] [(A) O]

[(初升的) 太阳] [(默默地) 照耀着] [(广阔的) 原野]

chūshēng de tàiyáng mò mò de zhàoyào zhe guǎngkuò de yuányě

[(rising **de**) sun] [(silent **de**) illuminate **zhe**] [(vast **de**) country]

The rising sun silently illuminates the vast country.

If there is a C, it will be suffixed to V wherever the latter occurs. C is either positioned between V and O:

[(A) S] [(Ad) V (C)] [(A) O]
 [(初升的) 太阳] [(默默地) 照 (亮) 了] [(广阔的) 原野]
chūshēng de tàiyáng mò mò de zhàoliàng le guǎngkuò de yuányě
 [(rising **de**) sun] [(silent **de**) illuminate **le**] [(vast **de**) country]

or positioned at the end by using a 把 **ba** construction:

[(A) S] { (Ad) 把 **ba** [(A) O] V (C) }
 [(初升的) 太阳] {(默默地) 把 [(广阔的) 原野] 照 (亮) 了}
chūshēng de tàiyáng mò mò de bǎ guǎngkuò de yuányě zhàoliàng le
 [(rising **de**) sun] {(silent **de**) **ba** [(vast **de**) country] illuminate **le**}

The rising sun silently illuminated the vast country.

[(A) S] {把 **ba** [(A) O] (Ad) V (C) }
 [(初升的) 太阳] { 把 [(广阔的) 原野] (全都) 照 (亮) 了}
chūshēng de tàiyáng bǎ guǎngkuò de yuányě quán dōu zhàoliàng le
 [(rising **de**) sun] {cv:**ba** [(vast **de**) country] (completely) illuminate-d **le**}
 The rising sun completely illuminated the vast country.

Syntactical configurations like these can be said to be the standard patterns for a Chinese sentence, but such alignments are, of course, theoretical constructs.

In actual speech or writing, Chinese speakers do not formulate their utterances or sentences by adhering rigidly to these theoretical constructs. Instead, they will tend to use a loose sequence of them with contextual or cotextual omissions here and there, and the result is a natural, coherent, intelligible and, often, stylistic amalgamation of a set of shifting focuses. For instance:

冬天的太阳刚刚升起，把天边的云霞染红了，连地上的积雪也发着微微的红光。

dōngtiān de tàiyáng gānggāng shēngqǐ | bǎ tiānbiān de yúnxia rǎn hóng le | lián dì shàng de jīxuě yě fā zhe wēiwēi de hóngguāng

winter **de** sun recently rise up, cv:**ba** horizon **de** clouds dye red **le**,
 even ground-on **de** lying snow also emit **zhe** faint red glow

The recently risen winter sun turns the clouds on the horizon red,
 and even the lying snow takes on a faint red hue.

If we examine this sentence, we can see that the first clause is a complete SVC theoretical sentential construct (where S = the sun, V = to rise, C = up); this is followed by a *ba* OVC construction (where O = clouds, V = to dye, C = red) with its S (= the sun) understood from the first clause: finally, there is an independent SVO construction (where S = snow, V = to emit, O = light). They come together as one sentence, with the first and second clauses sharing the same subject, and the second and third parts expressing different aspects of the winter sunshine early in the day.

29.1.2 Formalized sets of grammatical words as articulators

As we have said at the beginning of this section, Chinese syntax does not make use of grammatical devices such as declensions or conjugations, nor does it particularly favour the use of conjunctions at every step. What provides grammatical relationships and articulates connections between individual items in sentences is a few formalized sets of grammatical words, namely:

- (a) The negator, 不 *bù* ‘not’ or 没 *méi* in the context of a past narrative or in the presence of the verb 有 *yǒu* ‘to have, to exist’. 别 *bié* ‘don’t, do not’ also regularly occurs in imperatives.
- (b) 把 *bǎ*, to move an object forward to a pre-verb position so as to leave the post-verb position free for a complement,
- (c) 被 *bèi*, to introduce a notional subject in a formal passive construction for narrative purposes.
- (d) The three *de* markers: 的 for attributives, 地 for adverbials, and 得 for complements.
- (e) The aspect markers, 了 *le* for completion, 过 *guo* for experience, 着 *zhe* for continuity, 在 *zài* for continuation. The first three are suffixed to verbs. The last one is prefixed to verbs and derives from the coverb 在 *zài*, which as an aspect marker is used without a location object, e.g. 在那儿看书 *zài nàr kànshū* ‘to be there reading’ > 在看书 *zài kànshū* ‘to be reading’.
- (f) Referential adverbs: 也 *yě* ‘also’, 就 *jiù* ‘then’. 都 *dōu* ‘both, all’, 还 *hái* ‘in addition’, 只 *zhǐ* ‘only’, 再 *zài* ‘again’, and 又 *yòu* ‘once again’ (for past narratives). These referential adverbs not only lubricate the flow of conjoined syntactic units but they also follow set patterns of precedence or concurrence both amongst themselves and in conjunction with negators and/or modals, e.g.

也就都不再 **yě jiù dōu bù zài** as in

他们也就都不再提这件事儿了。

tāmen yě jiù dōu bù zài tí zhèi jiàn shìr le

‘They have never brought that matter up again since then.’

or 也就都不能再 **yě jiù dōu bù néng zài** as in

他们也就都不能再提这件事儿了。

tāmen yě jiù dōu bù néng zài tí zhèi jiàn shìr le

‘They cannot bring this/the matter up again after this.’

and, specifically,

也就 **yě jiù** 就都 **jiù dōu** 都不 **dōu bù** 不再 **bù zài**

也都 **yě dōu** 都还 **dōu hái** 还不 **hái bù** 还会再 **hái huì zài**

又都 **yòu dōu** 又再 **yòu zài** 再也 **zài yě** 再也不 **zài yě bù**

都没 **dōu méi** 没再 **méi zài** 还没 **hái méi** 再也没 **zài yě méi**

别再 **bié zài** 再也别 **zài yě bié**

- (g) ‘End-of-sentence’ particles, i.e. 了 *le* for expository sentences, 吗 *ma* for yes–no questions, 呢 *ne* for question-word questions, 吧 *ba* for imperatives or rhetorical questions, and 啊 *a* for exclamations.

29.1.3 An illustrative example

To illustrate our point about word order and grammatical articulators, let us start with a statement with three independent lexemes;

我 **wǒ** ‘I’, a pronoun;

做 **zuò** ‘to do’, a verb;

作业 **zuòyè** ‘assignment’

To say “I have done my assignment”, the pronoun subject, the predicate verb and the noun object are arranged in an **SVO** sequence, with the help of the aspect marker 了 *le*, which is placed after the verb to indicate that the action of ‘doing one’s assignment’ has been completed. The sentence is then rounded off with the homophonous expository sentence particle 了 *le* to indicate that *that* is the situation you are now in:

我做了作业了。 **wǒ zuò le zuòyè le**

In southern Chinese speech, the verb 完 **wán** ‘completed’ may be used to complement the verb 做 **zuò**, either to replace the aspect marker or to supplement it:

我做完了作业了。 **wǒ zuò wán zuòyè le**

or

我做完了作业了。 **wǒ zuò wán le zuòyè le**

The statement can, of course, be elaborated by adding adverbials and attributives:

我早已很快地做完了今天的作业了。

wǒ zǎo yǐ hěn kuài de zuò wán le jīntiān de zuòyè le

'I quickly finished today's assignment some time ago.'

Here we have 早 **zǎo** 'early, i.e. some time ago', and 已 **yǐ** 'already', a shortened form of 已经 **yǐ jīng** 'already', linked as the disyllabic adverbial 早已 **zǎoyǐ**; 很 **hěn** 'very'; 快 **kuài** 'fast, quickly'; 地 **de** an adverbial marker usually associated with manner; 今天 **jīntiān** 'today'; and 的 **de** an attributive marker.

However, a more colloquial version would be something like:

今天的作业我早就做完了。

jīntiān de zuòyè wǒ zǎo jiù zuò wán le

This is now a notional passive with a topic. The grammatical object of the previous version has been moved to the beginning of the sentence to become the topic, while the original grammatical subject, 'I', as the initiator of the action, retains its position before the predicate verb. The referential adverb 就 **jiù** has been introduced to form, in conjunction with 早 **zǎo**, the adverb 早就 **zǎo jiù**, which itself has a disyllabic rhythm typical of the language.

Now let's put the simple SVO utterance into a context, firstly as a question with 吗 **ma**:

你做完作业了吗? **nǐ zuò wán le zuòyè le ma**

'Have you finished the assignment?'

The answer might be:

我还没做完作业。 **wǒ hái méi zuò wán zuòyè**

'I haven't finished the assignment yet.'

The respondent in making this denial uses the adverb 还 **hái** 'yet, still' with the negator 没 **méi** 'not'. As we know, adverbials and negators usually come immediately before the verb (or coverb if there is one). If there are two adverbs, as here, the negator is generally placed closer to the verb.

If 呢 **ne** is added to the end of the sentence, it implies that the speaker may intend to or hope to finish the assignment as soon as he can but has not yet been able to do so, perhaps contrary to the expectations of the questioner:

我还没做完作业呢。 **wǒ hái méi zuò wán zuòyè ne**

'I have not finished the assignment yet.'

A follow-up could be expressed in the form of an imperative:

你先做完作业吧! **nǐ xiān zuò wán zuòyè ba**
'Finish the assignment first!'

or

你先做完作业再出去玩儿吧!
nǐ xiān zuò wán zuòyè zài chūqù wánr ba
'Finish the assignment first and then go out and enjoy yourself!' or
'Finish the assignment before you go out to enjoy yourself!'

In the first example, 先 **xiān** 'first' as an adverb is placed before the verb and 吧 **ba** at the end indicates the imperative. In fact, 吧 **ba** could be omitted with the command being expressed by tone of voice, but this would sound more harsh.

In the second example, there is a sequence of three Vs, 做 **zuò** 'to do', 出去 **chūqù** 'to go out' and 玩儿 **wánr** 'to enjoy yourself, have fun'. The two Ad's 先 **xiān** 'first' and 再 **zài** 'and then, not before' modify respectively the verb 做 **zuò** in the first sentential construct and 出去玩儿 **chūqù wánr** in the second. The two consecutive Vs in the second construct are similar to an English verb plus an infinitive, which indicates that the purpose of 'going out' is 'to enjoy oneself'. No connector is needed to join the two parts of the sentence, because the referential adverbs 先...再 **xiān...zài** themselves fulfil the conjoining role.

Another way to couch the instruction would be to employ the 把 **bǎ** construction, particularly in conjunction with the complement 完 **wán**:

你先把作业做完吧! **nǐ xiān bǎ zuòyè zuò wán ba /**
你先把作业做完再出去玩儿吧!
nǐ xiān bǎ zuòyè zuò wán zài chūqù wánr ba

As we have seen earlier ([Chapter 12](#)), the function of 把 **bǎ** is to shift an object (in this case 作业 **zuòyè**) to a pre-verb position (the verb here being 做 **zuò**) in order to leave the post-verb position free for the complement (完 **wán**). The adverb 先 **xiān** immediately precedes the coverb 把 **bǎ**.

If the task has finally been completed, the sentence to indicate this could be rendered as a formal passive, perhaps with some vehemence:

作业都让我给做完啦!
zuòyè dōu ràng wǒ gěi zuò wán la
(lit. assignment all by me **gei** finish **la**)
I have finished all the assignment!

让...给 **ràng...gěi** is a more colloquial version than 被 **bèi**, and one would be less likely to use a formal narrative like 作业被我做完啦 **zuòyè bèi wǒ zuò wán la** in such a situation. 都 **dōu** also introduces an emphatic note ('all my homework'), as does 啦 **la**, which, as we have seen (23.9 and 24.2), is a fusion of 了啊 **le a** and always conveys some exclamatory force.

It could also be shaped colloquially as a notional passive:

作业我都做完啦! zuòyè wǒ dōu zuò wán la

Here 作业 **zuòyè** has been moved from an object position to the beginning of the utterance, where it is now posed as the topic under discussion and is immediately followed by the original subject, the initiator of the action in the verb ('I'), and then by the predicate.

Because the context makes it clear, the original subject, the speaker and the initiator of the action (做 **zuò**) can, in fact, be omitted:

作业都做完啦! zuòyè dōu zuò wán la

The utterance has now taken the most typical format of a notional passive in Chinese.

Further to this and even more simply, as the context is unmistakably clear, the utterance can be reduced to the predicate verb **V** with its referential adverb, the complement and the end-of-sentence particle:

都做完啦! dōu zuò wán la

And finally or most simply it can be reduced to:

做完啦! zuò wán la

29.2 A close examination of the interaction between the microsyntax of lexemic formation and the macrosyntax of sentential formulation

Having made a brief survey of the chief mechanisms in the formation of words and sentences in Chinese, we shall now have a detailed look at the behaviour of the five types of syntactically oriented lexeme in macrosyntax.

29.2.1 The syntactic behaviour of lexemes of the juxtapositional type

We have seen in Morphology and Syntax (I) that there are three kinds of juxtaposition in a juxtapositional lexeme.

- (a) Antonymous juxtapositions¹. Though these generate a fair number of lexemes, they are limited mostly to nouns, and we will therefore not discuss them here.
- (b) Hyponymic juxtapositions. These too are mostly nouns, though a few of them take the form of adjectives or verbs. For instance,

狼狈 **lángbèi** 'in a sorry plight' (狼 **láng** 'wolf', 狈 **bèi** 'a legendary animal, which is said to have forelegs so short that it could only get around with the help of a wolf')
 鱼肉 **yúròu** 'to oppress, victimize' (鱼 **yú** 'fish', 肉 **ròu** 'meat')

- (c) Synonymous juxtapositions form the majority of disyllabic adjectives and a considerable number of verbs, and these will be our concern now.

¹ Antonymous juxtapositions like 始终 **shǐzhōng** 'from beginning to end', 迟早 **chízǎo** 'sooner or later', which function as adverbs, are rare.

29.2.1.1 Synonymously juxtaposed adjectives

The difference between a synonymously juxtaposed disyllabic adjective and its monosyllabic counterpart, if there is one, is that the former usually sets out to describe or portray, while the latter defines or differentiates. The former is, therefore, more likely to be used attributively and the latter, predicatively.

他取得了巨大的成就。 **tā qǔdé le jùdà de chéngjiù**
 'He achieved immense success'

他的成就很大。 **tā de chéngjiù hěn dà**
 'His achievements were very great'

她有个灵敏的头脑。 **Tā yǒu gè língmǐn de tóunǎo**
 'She had an acute mind'

她的头脑很灵。 **tā de tóunǎo hěn líng**
 'Her mind was very acute'

这是多么美丽的景色啊！ **zhè shì duōme měilì de jǐngsè a**
 'What a beautiful scene this is!'

这里的景色真美。 **zhèlǐ de jǐngsè zhēn měi**
‘The view here is really beautiful’

But these are tendencies not absolute rules. Many disyllabic juxtapositional adjectives do not have monosyllabic counterparts at all and they are often used predicatively as well as attributively.

29.2.1.2 *Synonymously juxtaposed verbs*

As far as synonymously juxtaposed disyllabic verbs are concerned, they are generally transitive verbs, and the object they govern must at least be disyllabic (apart from pronouns or monosyllabic indefinite nouns like 人 *rén* ‘others, people’).²

² See the chapter on Prosody and Syntax.

In fact, juxtapositional verbs do not necessarily have a monosyllabic counterpart, because they often belong to different semantic fields. If a juxtapositional verb does have a monosyllabic counterpart, the tone of the former is usually more formal than the more colloquial latter:

谢谢您帮助我解决了我的困难。

xièxie nín bāngzhù wǒ jiějué le wǒ de kùnnan

‘Thank you for helping me to resolve my difficulties.’

我来帮你拿行李。

wǒ lái bāng nǐ ná xínglǐ

‘I’ll come and help you with your luggage.’

我们正在制订长远的规划。

wǒmen zhèngzài zhìdìng chángyuǎn de guīhuà

‘We are in the process of formulating a long-term programme.’

我们正在订计划。

wǒmen zhèngzài dìng jìhuà

‘We are just drawing up a plan.’

他受伤了，你去顶替他上场比赛吧。

tā shòushāng le | nǐ qù dǐngtì tā shàngchǎng bǐsài ba

‘He is injured. You go on the pitch to replace him in the match.’

他病了，你去顶他一下。

tā bìng le | nǐ qù dǐng tā yíxià

‘He has been taken ill. You go and replace him.’

站长催促乘客赶快上车。

zhànzhǎng cuīcù chéngkè gǎnkuài shàng chē

'The station master urged the passengers to hurry and board the train.'

妈妈催我赶快起床。

māma cuī wǒ gǎnkuài qǐchuáng

'Mother told me to hurry and get up.'

29.2.2 *The syntactic behaviour of lexemes of the modification type*

We will concentrate here on those modificational adjectives and verbs that have bearing on macrosyntactic constructions.

29.2.2.1 *Modificational adjectives that have inbuilt adverbs*

We know that adjectives are generally modifiable by degree adverbs. This is particularly so in Chinese syntax, because an adjective implies contrast if it is not modified. For instance,

杯子掉在地上摔得很碎。 **bēizi diào zài dìshàng shuāi de hěn suì**
'The cup fell on the floor and broke into pieces.'

*杯子掉在地上摔得碎。 **bēizi diào zài dìshàng shuāi de suì**

But to imply contrast:

杯子掉在地上摔得碎摔不碎?

bēizi diào zài dìshàng shuāidesuì shuāibusuì

'Will the cup break into pieces (or not) when it falls on the floor?'

这些台词他背得很熟。

zhèi xiē táicí tā bèi de hěn shú

'He memorized these lines (of a play) very well.'

*这些台词他背得熟。 **zhèi xiē táicí tā bèi de shú**

But to imply contrast:

这些台词他背得熟背不熟? **zhèi xiē táicí tā bèideshú bèibushú**

'Can/Could he memorize these lines well?'

However, there is a group of modificational adjectives that can be used only predicatively or as a complement. These adjectives have an inbuilt degree modifier and therefore cannot be modified again.

粉碎 **fěnsuì** ‘broken into smithereens’

杯子掉在地上摔得粉碎。 **bēizi diào zài dìshàng shuāi de fěnsuì**
‘The cup fell to the ground and broke into smithereens.’

*杯子掉在地上摔得很粉碎。

bēizi diào zài dìshàng shuāi de hěn fěnsuì

烂熟 **lànshú** ‘thoroughly familiar, well-learned’

这些台词他背得烂熟。 **zhèi xiē táicí tā bèi de lànshú**
‘He thoroughly memorized these lines.’

*这些台词他背得非常烂熟。

zhèi xiē táicí tā bèi de fēicháng lànshú

Because of its intrinsic structural design, a modificational adjective is, in fact, often coined to define dichotomous situations:

难吃 **nánchī** ‘not good to eat, unpalatable’,

好吃 **hǎochī** ‘tasty, delicious’

全面 **quánmiàn** ‘all round, comprehensive’,

片面 **piànmiàn** ‘one-sided, unilateral’

乐观 **lèguān** ‘optimistic’, 悲观 **bēiguān** ‘pessimistic’

热门 **rènmén** ‘popular, in great demand’,

冷门* **lěngmén** ‘unpopular, not much in demand’

主要* **zhǔyào** ‘primary, main’, 次要* **cìyào** ‘secondary, minor’

上等* **shàngděng** ‘first class’, 下等* **xiàděng** ‘inferior’

已婚* **yǐhūn** ‘married’, 未婚* **wèihūn** ‘unmarried’

As you can see from their respective English equivalents, some of these adjectives (marked with an asterisk) define rather than describe. They are not all modifiable by degree adverbs.

29.2.2.2 *Modificational verbs that necessitate plurality*

There is a group of modificational verbs that is intransitive in nature and necessitates the use of a plural subject or a coverbal phrase indicating mutual association between at least two participants. The modifiers are normally morphemes such as 相 **xiāng** ‘mutually’, 共 **gòng** ‘together’, 联 **lián** ‘jointly’, 合 **hé** ‘collaboratively’, 互 **hù** ‘reciprocally’, 对 **duì** ‘opposing’, 交 **jiāo** ‘crisscrossing’, etc. For instance,

他们在街上偶然相遇。 **tāmen zài jiē shàng ǒurán xiāngyù**
‘They met by chance on the street’

他跟她在街上偶然相遇。

tā gēn tā zài jiē shàng ǒurán xiāngyù

'He met her by chance on the street'

*他在街上偶然相遇。 **tā zài jiē shàng ǒurán xiāngyù**

他们共事过三年。 **tāmen gòngshì guo sān nián**

'They worked together for three years'

他与她共事过三年。 **tā yǔ tā gòngshì guo sān nián**

'He worked with her for three years'

*他共事过三年。 **tā gòngshì guo sān nián**

有空我和你联系。 **yǒukòng wǒ hé nǐ liánxi**

'If I have time, I will get in touch with you'

有空请你和我联系。 **yǒukòng qǐng nǐ hé wǒ liánxi**

'If you have time, please get in touch with me'

*有空你联系。 **yǒukòng nǐ liánxi**

咱们能合作吗？ **zánmen néng hézuò ma**

'Can we cooperate?'

你能跟我合作吗？ **nǐ néng gēn wǒ hézuò ma**

'Can you cooperate with me?'

*你能合作吗？ **nǐ néng hézuò ma**

我们可以互换座位吗？ **wǒmen kěyǐ hùhuàn zuòwèi ma**

'Can we change places?'

我可以跟你互换座位吗？

wǒ kěyǐ gēn nǐ hùhuàn zuòwèi ma

'Can I change places with you?'

*我可以互换座位吗？ **wǒ kěyǐ hùhuàn zuòwèi ma**

原告与被告在法庭上对质。

yuángào yǔ bèigào zài fǎtíng shàng duìzhì

'The plaintiff/accuser and the defendant/accused confronted each other in court'

两人在法庭上对质。 **liǎng rén zài fǎtíng shàng duìzhì**

'The two men/parties confronted each other in court'

*原告在法庭上对质。 **yuángào zài fǎtíng shàng duìzhì**

他们在会后交谈了很久。 **tāmen zài huì hòu jiāotán le hěn jiǔ**
'After the meeting, they chatted for a long time'

他与她在会后交谈了很久。

tā yǔ tā zài huì hòu jiāotán le hěn jiǔ

'He chatted with her for a long time after the meeting'

*他在会后交谈了很久。 **tā zài huì hòu jiāotán le hěn jiǔ**

29.2.3 The syntactic behaviour of lexemes of the predicational type

In the following discussion on predicational lexemes, we will first focus on those used as verbs. We will then move on to those forming part of quadrisyllabic idioms, because the latter may be used as predicates, adverbials, attributives or complements.

29.2.3.1 The syntactic–semantic relationship between **S** and **V** in a predicational lexeme

We have seen in Morphology and Syntax (I) that predicational nouns are mainly found in three semantic domains, namely natural phenomena, human physical conditions and politics. For example,

日出 **rìchū** 'sunrise' (日 **rì** 'the sun', 出 **chū** 'to come out')

牙痛 **yátòng** 'toothache' (牙 **yá** 'tooth', 痛 **tòng** 'to ache')

脉搏 **màibó** 'pulse' (脉 **mài** 'pulse', 搏 **bó** 'to pulsate')

泥疗 **níliáo** 'mud therapy' (泥 **ní** 'mud', 疗 **liáo** 'to cure')

政治 **zhèngzhì** 'politics' (政 **zhèng** 'government', 治 **zhì** 'to rule, govern')

民主³ **mínzhǔ** 'democracy' (民 **mín** 'people', 主 **zhǔ** 'to decide, be the master')

刑罚 **xíngfá** 'punishment' (刑 **xíng** 'torture', 罚 **fá** 'to punish')

³ Most political and economic terms were borrowed from Japanese in the 1930s or 1940s, e.g. 政治 **zhèngzhì** and 民主 **mínzhǔ**.

These nouns are truly predicational constructions, in that the first noun component in the lexeme initiates the action in the second.

However, with predicational verbs or adjectives, 'predication' in the majority of cases is something of a misnomer with regard to their **S** and **V** relationship.

掌握 **zhǎngwò** 'to grasp, master, have the command of'
(掌 **zhǎng** 'palm', 握 **wò** 'grasp')
他掌握了最新技术。 **tā zhǎngwò le zuì xīn jìshù**
'He has command of the latest techniques.'

Obviously, it is 他 **tā** 'he' who has mastered the latest techniques and not the 'palm'. The palm, though a subject in the microlexical construction, is only a metaphorical representation of the true human agent in the macrosyntax.

蔓延 **mànyán** 'to spread' (蔓 **màn** 'vine, tendril', 延 **yán** 'to extend')
火势蔓延到了其他建筑物上。
huǒshì mànyán dào le qítā jiànzhùwù shàng
'The fire has spread to the other buildings.'

The sentence can be understood only as saying that the 'fire' has now spread to the other buildings, similar to the way that 'vines or tendrils' attach themselves to other nearby plants.

From the examples, we can see that the microlexical subject in a predicational verb in most cases simply functions as a metaphorical subject. The true subject is to be found in macrosyntax.

In other cases, these lexical subjects indicate parts associated with the macrosubject or represent instruments, material, location, and so on.

Parts associated with the macrosubject:

年长 **niánzhǎng** 'to be older than'
(年 **nián** 'age', 长 **zhǎng** 'to grow old')
我比她年长三岁。
wǒ bǐ tā niánzhǎng sān suì
'I am three years older than she is.'

片长 **piàncháng** '(of a film) to last (of time)'
(片 **piàn** short for 影片 **yǐngpiàn** 'film', 长 **cháng** 'long')
影片片长两个半小时/钟头。
yǐngpiàn piàncháng liǎng gè bàn xiǎoshí / zhōngtóu
'The film lasts two and a half hours.'

梦见 **mèngjiàn** 'to dream of' (梦 **mèng** 'dream', 见 **jiàn** 'to see')
我梦见去世多年的母亲。
wǒ mèngjiàn qùshì duō nián de mǔqīn
'I dreamed of my mother, who passed away many years ago.'

As an instrument:

枪毙 **qiāngbì** ‘to execute by shooting/firing’ (枪 **qiāng** ‘rifle’, 毙 **bì** ‘to kill’)
杀人犯应该不应该枪毙? **shārénfàn yīnggāi bù yīnggāi qiāngbì**
‘Should murderers be shot or not?’

钳制 **qiánzhì** ‘to suppress’ (钳 **qián** ‘pliers’, 制 **zhì** ‘to restrict, control’)
政府不该钳制公众舆论。 **zhèngfǔ bù gāi qiánzhì gōngzhòng yúlùn**
‘The government should not gag public opinion.’

盆栽 **pénzāi** ‘to pot (a plant)’ (盆 **pén** ‘pot’, 栽 **zāi** ‘to plant’)
这种植物可以盆栽。 **zhèi zhǒng zhíwù kěyǐ pénzāi**
‘Plants like these can be potted.’

As a method:

邮寄 **yóuji** ‘to send by post’ (邮 **yóu** ‘post’, 寄 **jì** ‘to send’)
这些信件都要邮寄。 **zhèi xiē xìnjiàn dōu yào yóuji**
‘These letters all need to be posted.’

空运 **kōngyùn** ‘to airlift, transport by air’
(空 **kōng** ‘air’, 运 **yùn** ‘transport’)
这箱书空运要多少钱?
zhèi xiāng shū kōngyùn yào duōshǎo qián
‘How much would it cost to send this box of books by air?’

As material:

粉刷 **fěnsuā** ‘to whitewash’ (粉 **fěn** ‘powder’, 刷 **shuā** ‘to brush’)
墙壁还没粉刷呢。 **qiángbì hái méi fěnsuā ne**
‘The wall has not been whitewashed yet.’

油炸 **yóuzhá** ‘to deep fry’ (油 **yóu** ‘oil’, 炸 **zhá** ‘to deep-fry’)
这些土豆片要油炸吗? **zhèi xiē tǔdòu piàn yào yóuzhá ma**
‘Do these (potato) chips need to be deep fried?’

Indicating similarity (as a metaphor or simile):

鸟瞰 **niǎokàn** ‘to have a bird’s eye view of’
(鸟 **niǎo** ‘bird’, 瞰 **kàn** ‘to look’)
他在埃菲尔铁塔上鸟瞰巴黎。
tā zài āifēi’ěr tiětǎ shàng niǎokàn bālí
‘He had a bird’s-eye view of Paris from the top of the Eiffel Tower.’

模仿 **mófǎng** ‘to mimic, imitate’ (模 **mó** ‘model’, 仿 **fǎng** ‘to imitate’)
小孩模仿大人的行为。 **xiǎohái mófǎng dàrén de xíngwéi**
‘Children imitate the behaviour of adults.’

磨叨 **mòdao** ‘to jabber’ (磨 **mò** ‘millstone’, 叨 **dāo** ‘to babble’)
别磨叨啦! **bié mòdao la** ‘Don’t nag any more!’

奴役 **núyì** ‘to enslave’ (奴 **nú** ‘slave’, 役 **yì** ‘to labour’)
他们不甘受贫困的奴役。 **tāmen bùgān shòu pínkùn de núyì**⁴
‘They are not resigned to (the fate of) being enslaved by poverty.’

⁴ The verb 奴役 **núyì** ‘to enslave’ is nominalized here and is similar to an English verbal noun.

29.2.3.2 The formal and classical tone of some predication verbs

The formal and classical tone of predication verbs is based on the quadrisyllabic rhythms of classical quadrisyllabic idioms:

Parallel disyllabic rhythms:

鹊起 **quèqǐ** ‘to rise (to fame)’ (鹊 **què** ‘magpie’, 起 **qǐ** ‘to rise’)
哈利波特的作者声誉鹊起。 **hālībōtè de zuòzhě shēngyù quèqǐ**
‘The author of Harry Potter rose to fame.’

雀跃 **quèyuè** ‘to jump for joy’ (雀 **què** ‘sparrow’, 跃 **yuè** ‘to jump’)
广场上的群众闻讯雀跃。
guǎngchǎng shàng de qúnzhòng wénxùn quèyuè
‘The people on the square jumped for joy when they heard the news.’

蜗居 **wōjū** ‘to live humbly’ (蜗 **wō** ‘snail’, 居 **jū** ‘to live’)
那个老人整天蜗居斗室。 **nèi gè lǎorén zhěngtiān wōjū dòushì**
‘That old man shut himself up in a small room all day long.’

The use of a monosyllabic or disyllabic function word to achieve the rhythm:

(a) 如 **rú**, 似 **sì** or 乎 **hū** ‘to be similar to’:

泉涌 **quányǒng** ‘to gush out like water from a spring’
(泉 **quán** ‘spring’, 涌 **yǒng** ‘to gush out’)
老人听后泪如泉涌。 **lǎorén tīng hòu lèi rú quányǒng**
‘When the old man heard, tears welled up in his eyes.’

貌似 **màosì** (貌 **mào** ‘appearance’, 似 **sì** ‘to resemble’)
他貌似公允，其实不然。 **tā màosì gōngyǎn | qíshí bùrán**
‘He appeared to be impartial, but in fact he really wasn’t.’

类乎 **lèihū** (类 **lèi** ‘category’, 乎 **hū** ‘to be like’)
这个故事类乎神话。 **zhèi gè gùshi lèihū shénhuà**
‘This story is like a myth.’

(b) 而 *ér* ‘in that way’:

蜂拥 *fēngyǒng* ‘to swarm around’

(蜂 *fēng* ‘bee’, 拥 *yǒng* ‘to swarm’)

他从法庭出来，记者蜂拥而上。

tā cóng fǎtíng chūlái | jìzhě fēngyǒng ér shàng

‘When he came out of the court, reporters swarmed around him.’

鱼贯 *yúguàn* ‘to walk in or out in a file’

(鱼 *yú* ‘fish’, 贯 *guàn* ‘to file in or out’)

在音乐声中，运动员鱼贯而入。

zài yīnyuè shēng zhōng | yùndòngyuán yúguàn ér rù

‘The athletes filed in to the sound of music.’

(c) 感到 *gǎndào*, 觉得 *juéde* ‘to feel’:

内疚 *nèijiù* ‘inner guilt, guilty conscience’

(内 *nèi* ‘inside’, 疚 *jiù* ‘remorse, conscience’)

感到内疚 *gǎndào nèijiù* ‘to feel guilty, have a guilty conscience’

口干 *kǒugān* ‘to feel thirsty’ (口 *kǒu* ‘mouth’, 干 *gān* ‘dry’)

觉得口干 *juéde kǒugān* ‘to feel thirsty’

(d) 令人 *lìng rén* ‘to make one, make people’:

神往 *shénwǎng* ‘to be captivated, carried away’

(神 *shén* ‘spirit’, 往 *wǎng* ‘to go towards’)

令人神往 *lìng rén shénwǎng* ‘captivating’

心醉 *xīnzùi* ‘to be fascinated’ (心 *xīn* ‘heart’, 醉 *zuì* ‘to get drunk’)

令人心醉 *lìng rén xīnzùi* ‘fascinating’

In addition, any quadrisyllabic rhythm is acceptable:

气馁 *qìněi* ‘to lose heart’ (气 *qì* ‘breath’, 馁 *něi* ‘dispirited’)

他从不气馁。 *tā cóngbù qìněi* ‘He never lost heart.’

瓢泼 *piáopō* ‘(of rain) to fall in buckets’

(瓢 *piáo* ‘ladle’, 泼 *pō* ‘to sprinkle, spray’)

大雨瓢泼。 *dà yǔ piáopō*

‘The rain came down in torrents, there was a downpour.’

29.2.3.3 Predicational lexemes or idioms

Predicational lexemes or idioms, especially the numerous quadrisyllabic idioms, must be used in appropriate contexts or cotexts and they are

commonly employed with linguistic and stylistic flair and finesse. They never sound hackneyed to the native ear.

Quadrisyllabic idioms, as we have seen in Morphology and Syntax (I), may be shaped as parallel or continuous constructions. Depending on meaning, they may be used as predicates, adverbials, attributives or complements:

(a) parallel constructions:

- (i) 心驰神往 **xīnchí shénwǎng** 'one's thoughts fly to (a distant place or person)' (心 **xīn** 'heart, mind', 驰 **chí** 'to speed (along)', 神 **shén** 'spirit', 往 **wǎng** 'to head for')

as a predicate:

我对这座海边的城市一直心驰神往。

wǒ duì zhè zuò hǎibiān de chéngshì yīzhí xīnchí shénwǎng
'My heart always longs for this seaside town.'

这座海边的城市一直使我心驰神往。

zhè zuò hǎibiān de chéngshì yīzhí shǐ wǒ xīnchí shénwǎng
'This seaside town is always in my thoughts.'

as an attributive:

这座海边的城市一直是我心驰神往的地方。

zhè zuò hǎibiān de chéngshì yīzhí shì wǒ xīnchí shénwǎng de dìfang

'This seaside town is always the place I long for.'

- (ii) 目瞪口呆 **mùdèng kǒudāi** 'goggle-eyed and dumbstruck' (目 **mù** 'eye', 瞪 **dèng** 'to stare', 口 **kǒu** 'mouth', 呆 **dāi** 'blank, wooden')

as a predicate:

这一景象使我目瞪口呆。

zhè yī jǐngxiàng shǐ wǒ mùdèng kǒudāi
'This sight/scene makes me dumbstruck, dumbfounds me.'

as a complement:

他惊讶得目瞪口呆。 **tā jīngyà de mùdèng kǒudāi**

'He was so surprised he was dumbstruck.'

as an adverbial:

目瞪口呆地看着 **mùdèng kǒudāi de kàn zhe**
'to gape at in amazement'

(b) continuous constructions:

- (i) 心不在焉 **xīnbùzàiyān** ‘to be absent-minded’ (心 **xīn** ‘heart, mind’, 不 **bù** ‘not’, 在 **zài** ‘to exist’, 焉 **yān** ‘here’)

as a predicate:

上课时他根本心不在焉。

shàngkè shí tā gēnběn xīnbùzàiyān

‘In class he was totally absent-minded.’

as an adverbial:

心不在焉地听着 **xīnbùzàiyān de tīng zhe**

‘listening absent-mindedly’

as an attributive:

一副心不在焉的样子

yī fù xīnbùzàiyān de yàngzi

‘an expression of absent-mindedness’

- (ii) 目不转睛 **mùbùzhuǎnjīng** ‘to be all eyes, look fixedly’ (目 **mù** ‘eye’, 不 **bù** ‘not’, 转 **zhuǎn** ‘to turn’, 睛 **jīng** ‘(of eye) pupil’)

as an adverbial:

目不转睛地看着

mùbùzhuǎnjīng de kàn zhe

‘looking fixedly, with total concentration’

29.2.4 *The syntactic behaviour of lexemes of the governmental type*

We have seen in Morphology and Syntax (I) that governmental lexemes are a group of words in the lexicon that seem to be designed particularly to encode everyday experience, e.g. 起床 **qǐchuáng** ‘to get out of bed’, 穿衣 **chuānyī** ‘to put on one’s clothes’, 吃饭 **chīfàn** ‘to eat’, 坐车 **zuòchē** ‘to ride in a car’, 上班 **shàngbān** ‘to go to work’, 回家 **huíjiā** ‘to come home’, 干活 **gànhuó** ‘to work’, 睡觉 **shuìjiào** ‘to sleep’, etc, etc.

Sometimes the same daily experience is couched in different, yet equally common and acceptable, forms, e.g.

‘to make tea’: 沏茶 **qīchá**, 冲茶 **chōngchá**, 泡茶 **pàochā**.

‘to cook rice’: 做饭 **zuòfàn**, 煮饭 **zhǔfàn**, 烧饭 **shāofàn**.

All these governmental lexemes have a micro VO syntactic structure, and in the following subsections, we will examine how these micro VO lexical structures interact with macro VO syntactic constructions.

29.2.4.1 *The separability of a governmental lexeme*

One of the salient features of a governmental lexeme VO is its separability. It is actually called a 离合词 *líhécí* ‘lit. separable-linkable-word’ in Chinese grammar. What this means is that the word can be used as a word on its own and also as a VO collocation, where insertions can be made between V and O. For example,

洗澡 *xǐzǎo* ‘to take a bath’ (洗 *xǐ* ‘to wash’, 澡 *zǎo* ‘bath’)
我刚洗了个热水澡。 *wǒ gāng xǐ le ge rèshuǐzǎo*
‘I have just had a hot bath.’

诉苦 *sùkǔ* ‘to complain’ (诉 *sù* ‘to tell’, 苦 *kǔ* ‘bitterness’)
她诉了一阵苦。 *tā sù le yī zhèn kǔ*
‘She complained for quite a while.’

给分 *gěifēn* ‘to award marks to’
(给 *gěi* ‘to give’, 分 *fēn* ‘marks, points’)
老师给了我满分。 *lǎoshī gěi le wǒ mǎnfēn*
‘The teacher gave me full marks.’

归类 *guīlèi* ‘to classify’
(归 *guī* ‘to assign’, 类 *lèi* ‘category’)
请把这些书归成四类。 *qǐng bǎ zhèxiē shū guī chéng sì lèi*
‘Please classify these books into four categories.’

见面 *jiànmiàn* ‘to see somebody’ (见 *jiàn* ‘to see’, 面 *miàn* ‘face’)
我见过他一面。 *wǒ jiàn guo tā yī miàn*
‘I have met him once.’

耍赖 *shuǎlài* ‘to shamelessly deny something’
(耍 *shuǎ* ‘play (tricks)’, 赖 *lài* ‘denial’)
你耍什么赖！ *nǐ shuǎ shénme lài*
‘It’s absolutely useless for you to deny all this.’

拆台 *chāitái* ‘to cut the ground from under somebody’s feet’
(拆 *chāi* ‘to pull down’, 台 *tái* ‘platform, stage’)
你拆谁的台？ *nǐ chāi shéi de tái*
‘Whose authority are you trying to undermine?’

起床 **qǐchuáng** 'to get up' (起 **qǐ** 'to rise', 床 **chuáng** 'bed')
我床起得晚。 **wǒ chuáng qǐ de wǎn**
'I usually sleep late.'

领情 **lǐngqíng** 'to appreciate somebody's kindness'
(领 **lǐng** 'to acknowledge', 情 **qíng** 'kindness')
你的情我领了，但是礼物我不能收。
nǐ de qíng wǒ lǐng le | dànshì lǐwù wǒ bù néng shōu
'I appreciate your kindness, but I can't accept your gift.'

From the examples above we can see that though these VO constructions are established words, they behave almost like collocations. The verb component may be aspect-marked or complemented like an independent verb. It may take an indirect object, and its direct object component may be modified. In the last two examples, we can even see a cleft construction, whereby the O component in the lexeme has been moved to the beginning of the sentence to be topicalised.

In many cases, these lexemes in fact behave just like a normal V + O predicate:

回家 **huíjiā** 'to return home'
我是今早凌晨回的家。
wǒ shì jīnzǎo língchén huí de jiā
'I returned home before dawn this morning.'
昨晚我错过了末班车，回不了家。
zuówǎn wǒ cuò guo le mòbānchē | huíbuliǎo jiā
'Last night I missed the last bus and could not get home.'

吃苦 **chīkǔ** 'to endure hardships'
他吃得苦/吃不起苦。
tā chīdeqǐ kǔ/chībūqǐ kǔ
'He can endure/cannot endure hardship.'
他一辈子吃过不少苦。
tā yībèizi chī guo bùshǎo kǔ
'He has endured numerous hardships all his life.'

写字 **xiězì** 'to write (Chinese characters)'
她的手颤得写不了字。
tā de shǒu chàn de xiěbuliǎo zì
'Her hand was trembling so much she could not write.'
纸上写满了大大小小的字。
zhǐ shàng xiě mǎn le dàdàxiǎoxiǎo de zì
'Characters of all sizes were written all over the paper/the paper was filled with characters of all sizes.'

注意 **zhùyì** ‘to pay attention’

你注意就出不了差错了⁵。

nǐ zhù diǎn yì jiù chūbuliǎo chācuò le

‘No error will possibly occur if you care to pay more attention.’

我把他的话听拧了。**wǒ bǎ tā de huà tīng nǐng le**

‘I got his words wrong/I got him wrong.’

⁵ Generally, people would say 注意点儿 **zhùyì diǎnr** ‘to pay more attention’ instead.

The object in a governmental lexeme may often be a nominalized item, that is, an adjective or a verb instead of a noun. Such a lexeme, too, is separable:

他吃过一次亏。**tā chī guo yī cì kuī**

‘He came to grief once/he suffered loss once.’

我害过一次怕。**wǒ hài guo yī cì pà** ‘I was scared once.’

This intrinsic versatility, in the right circumstances, can be used with lexemes of other types, including phrasal constructions. For example,

我幽了他一默。**wǒ yōu le tā yī mò** ‘I played a joke on him.’

当晚我就把那个问题想了个透。

dàngwǎn wǒ jiù bǎ nèi ge wèntí xiǎng le ge tòu

‘I thought through the question that evening.’

A: 你真幸运。**nǐ zhēn xìngyùn** ‘You are truly lucky.’

B: 幸什么运! **xìng shénme yùn** ‘What luck have I got!’

你那台旧电脑还听不听使唤哪?

nǐ nà tái jiù diànnǎo hái tīng bù tīng shǐhuan na

‘Is that old computer of yours still working for you/responding to your command?’

没人问你, 你答什么茬儿/碴儿。

méi rén wèn nǐ | nǐ dá shénme chár

‘What were you doing answering, when nobody asked you?’

29.2.4.2 *The meaningful accompaniment of a coverbal phrase or*
来 **lái** or 去 **qù**

Despite the fact that a governmental lexeme is complete in itself, either it is used in the way we discussed in the last section or it is accompanied by a coverbal phrase to form a complete predicate. It is seldom used on its own. A sentence like the following is rare:

*他发誓。 **tā fāshì** 'He pledged.'
+他们跳舞。 **tāmen tiàowǔ** 'They danced.'

To form a complete predicate, one usually says:

他向大家发誓。 **tā xiàng dàjiā fāshì** 'He pledged to everyone.'
他们在那儿跳舞。 **tāmen zài nàr tiàowǔ** 'They were dancing there.'

Similarly,

向你道歉 **xiàng nǐ dàoqiàn** 'apologise to you'
跟他聊天 **gēn tā tántiān** 'chat with him'
和你告别 **hé nǐ gàobié** 'say goodbye to you'
替他出面 **tì tā chūmiàn** 'act on his behalf'
为他说情 **wèi tā shuōqíng** 'intercede for him'
由你负责 **yóu nǐ fùzé** 'the responsibility is yours'
给手机充电 **gěi shǒujī chōngdiàn** 'charge the mobile'
在公园里散步 **zài gōngyuán lǐ sànbù** 'take a walk in the park'
到国外去求学 **dào guó wài qù qiúxué** 'go abroad to study'

Also 来 **lái** or 去 **qù** can be added either before or after a governmental lexeme to make it a verb of purpose similar to an English infinitive:

谁来找我了? **shéi lái zhǎo wǒ le** 'Who has come to see me?'
你的朋友们拜年来了。 **nǐ de péngyoumen bàinián lái le**
'Your friends have come to wish you a happy new year.'

他去打球了。 **tā qù dǎqiú le** 'He's gone to play a (ball) game'
她买菜去了。 **tā mǎi cài qù le** 'She's gone to buy food'

29.2.4.3 A governmental lexeme with an object in macrosyntax

We know that a governmental lexeme has a microlexical VO construction with an inbuilt micro-object of its own, and it is usually self-sufficient without a macrosyntactic object. However, it is also possible for a governmental lexeme to take another object when it is used in a structure larger than itself. The condition is that the object usually indicates time or location or a number, and the resultant VO construction generally (if not always) ends as a quadrisyllabic expression almost parodying the classical format.

放眼未来 **fàngyǎn wèilái** 'to take a broad view of the future'
放眼世界 **fàngyǎn shìjiè** 'to have the whole world in view'

Likewise,

- 放假三天 **fàngjià sān tiān** as 放三天假 **fàng sān tiān jià** is more colloquial 'to have three days off'
 历时两年 **lìshí liǎng nián** 'to last for two years'
 放风一小时 **fàngfēng yī xiǎoshí** 'to let the prisoners spend an hour in the open'
 休会十分钟 **xiūhuì shí fēn zhōng** 'to adjourn the meeting for ten minutes'
 取道北京 **qǔdào běijīng** 'to go via Beijing'
 扎根基层 **zhāgēn jīcéng** 'to take root at the basic level'
 置身事外 **zhìshēn shì wài** 'to stay aloof from the affair'

The last example is actually an existing quadrisyllabic idiom.

Sometimes a governmental lexeme may also take a macro-object that indicates a number:

- 耗资数百万 **hàozī shù bǎi wàn** 'to cost a million'
 贷款十万元 **dàikuǎn shí wàn yuán** 'to loan a hundred thousand yuan'

Otherwise, the postposition 于 **yú** 'from, at' is introduced after the governmental verb and before the macro-object.

- 求助于人 **qiúzhù yú rén** 'to seek help from others'
 失信于民 **shīxìn yú mín** 'to break one's promise to the people'
 取悦于世 **qǔyuè yú shì** 'to try to please the world'

Also,

- 求助于他人 **qiúzhù yú tā rén** 'to seek help from others'
 失信于百姓 **shīxìn yú bǎixìng** 'to break one's promise to the people'
 取悦于观众 **qǔyuè yú guānzhòng** 'to please the audience'
 置身于局外 **zhìshēn yú jú wài** 'to stay aloof from what is happening'
 致力于科研 **zhìlì yú kēyán** 'to dedicate oneself to scientific research'
 着眼于未来 **zhuóyǎn yú wèilái** 'to set one's sight on the future'
 立足于世界 **lìzú yú shìjiè** 'to secure one's footing in the world'

It is also possible to place a macro O at the beginning of the sentence as the topic, so that the sentence ends with the micro O in the governmental lexeme itself. The prerequisite for such a construction is that the macro O and micro O must be of a 'whole-part' relationship, the macro O being the whole and the micro O being part of it or something closely related to it. For instance,

商品 **shāngpǐn** ‘commodity, goods’ and 价格 **jiàgé** ‘price’

这些商品标了价没有?

zhèi xiē shāngpǐn biāo le jià méiyǒu (标价 **biāojià** ‘to put a price on’)

‘Has a price been put on these goods?’

收入 **shōurù** ‘income’ and 所得税 **suǒdeshuì** ‘income tax’

这笔收入还没有打税。

zhèi bǐ shōurù hái méiyǒu dǎshuì (打税 **dǎshuì** ‘to pay tax’)

‘Income tax has not been paid on this income yet.’

考卷 **kǎojiàn** ‘examination paper’ and 题目 **tímù** ‘questions’

数学考卷出了题没有?

shùxué kǎojiàn chū le tí méiyǒu (出题 **chū tí** ‘to set questions’)

‘Have the questions been set for the mathematics examination paper?’

鱼 **yú** ‘fish’ and 骨头 **gǔtōu** ‘bones’

鱼还没去骨呢。 **yú hái méi qùgǔ ne** (去骨 **qùgǔ** ‘to bone’)

‘The fish has not been boned/filletted yet.’

伤口 **shāngkǒu** ‘wound’ and 线 **xiàn** ‘stitches’

伤口下礼拜可以拆线了。 **shāngkǒu xià lǐbài kěyǐ chāixiàn le**

‘The stitches can be taken from the wound next week.’

人 **rén** ‘person’ and 面 **miàn** ‘face’

这个人我好像在哪见过面。

zhèi ge rén wǒ hǎoxiàng zài nǎ jiàn guo miàn

‘I seem to have met this person somewhere before.’

事儿 **shìr** ‘matter’ and 究竟 **jiūjìng** ‘the crux/root (of the matter)’

这件事儿你一定要问个究竟。

zhèi jiàn shìr nǐ yīdìng yào wèn ge jiūjìng

‘You must get to the heart of this matter.’

29.2.4.4 *The same verb in macrosyntax and the microlexical formation of a governmental lexeme*

A governmental lexeme is usually a verb, but there are nouns that are also of a governmental type. It often happens that in the macrosyntactic construction, there is a VO construction, in which the O itself is already a microlexical VO construction including the same verb. In these cases, it is important to distinguish between ‘VV + O’ and ‘V + VO’ constructions. For instance,

按钮 **ànniǔ** 'button, push-button' (按 **àn** 'press', 钮 **niǔ** 'button') is obviously a noun, and it is possible to 'press the button' 按按钮 **àn ànniǔ**. The verb 按 **àn** can be repeated to indicate a brief action 按按 **àn'àn**, but it cannot be followed by the morpheme 钮 **niǔ**, because 钮 **niǔ** cannot be used on its own.

Other examples of this kind of formulation are:

画儿 **huàr** 'drawing' (画 **huà** 'painting', 儿 **r** a suffix)

画画儿 **huà huàr** 'to draw/paint a picture' (画 **huà** 'to draw, paint')

别针 **biézhēn** 'safety pin; brooch'

(别 **bié** 'to pin, fasten on', 针 **zhēn** 'needle, pin')

别别针 **bié biézhēn** 'to pin on a brooch'

包裹 **bāoguǒ** 'parcel, bundle'

(包 **bāo** 'to wrap up', 裹 **guǒ** 'to wrap (around)')

包包裹 **bāo bāoguǒ** 'to wrap up a parcel'

扳机 **bānjī** 'trigger' (扳 **bān** 'to pull', 机 **jī** 'mechanism')

扳扳机 **bān bānjī** 'to pull the trigger'

插销 **chāxiāo**/插头 **chātóu** 'plug'

(插 **chā** 'to insert', 销 **xiāo** bolt'/头 **tóu** 'head')

插插销 **chā chāxiāo**/插头 **chātóu** 'to plug in'

拉锁 **lāsuǒ**/拉链 **lālàn** 'zip fastener, zipper'

(拉 **lā** 'to pull', 锁 **suǒ** 'lock'/链 **liàn** 'chain')

拉拉锁 **lāsuǒ** /拉链 **lālàn** 'to zip up'

Care must be taken when similar graphemes or phonemes come together in a row. They often happen with governmental lexemes that share a homograph or homophone with another lexeme. Such cases though infrequent are not impossible. For instance,

他在门上上漆。 **tā zài mén shàng shàng qī**

'He paints the door' (上漆 **shàng qī** 'to apply paint')

她手上捧了一捧栗子。 **tā shǒu shàng pěng le yī pěng lizi**

'He carried some chestnuts cupped in his hands' (漆 **pěng** 'to hold/carry in both hands')

那个售货员包包(儿)包得真快。

nèi ge shòuhuòyuán bāo bāo(r) bāo de zhēn kuài

'That shop assistant wrapped up parcels really quickly.'

这个学位他获得得了还是获得不了?

zhèi ge xuéwèi tā huòdédeliǎo háishì huòdébuliǎo

‘Can he gain/pass this (academic) degree or not?’

这件行李已经过磅了。**zhèi jiàn xínglǐ yǐjīng guò guo bàng le**

‘This luggage has already been weighed.’

你用不着着急。**nǐ yòngbuzháo zháojí**

‘There is no need for you to be anxious.’

我今天走不了了。**wǒ jīntiān zǒubuliǎo le**

‘I can’t go today (after all).’

29.2.5 *The syntactic behaviour of lexemes of the complemental type*

Complemental lexemes (VC) are verbs by nature. They therefore often feature as part of the predicate of a sentence, and because of their inbuilt composition, they are seldom nominalized.

There are a number of complemental lexemes which are established and are listed in dictionaries, but these are lexemes that have both literal and figurative meanings. However, they are generally and freely coined on an ad hoc basis.

29.2.5.1 *Established and ad hoc forms of complemental lexemes*

We will demonstrate our point with the ‘resultant state’ verb 开 **kāi**, which has two related meanings: ‘open’ and ‘away’. Here are some of its established complemental lexemes in the lexicon linked with the meaning ‘open’:

打开 **dǎkāi** ‘to open’ 书本 **shūběn** ‘books’/箱子 **xiāngzi** ‘box’/

窗户 **chuānghu** ‘window’

打开 **dǎkāi** ‘to open, develop, begin’ 市场 **shìchǎng** ‘market’/

销路 **xiāolù** ‘sale, market’/思路 **sīlù** ‘train of thought’

拉开 **lākāi** ‘to pull open’ 抽屉 **chōuti** ‘drawer’/窗帘 **chuānglián** ‘curtain’

拉开 **lākāi** ‘to open, begin’ 序幕 **xùmù** ‘prelude, prologue’

解开 **jiěkāi** ‘to untie, undo’ 鞋带 **xiédài** ‘shoe lace’/大衣 **dàiyī** ‘overcoat’

解开 **jiěkāi** ‘to resolve’ 疑团 **yítuán** ‘doubts, suspicions’

揭开 **jiěkāi** ‘to uncover’ 被子 **bèizi** ‘quilt’

揭开 **jiěkāi** ‘to reveal’ 内幕 **nèimù** ‘the inside story’/

这个谜 **zhèi ge mí** ‘this mystery’

However, ad hoc complemental lexemes with 开 *kāi* meaning ‘open’ can also be easily created in particular circumstances:

撕开 *sīkāi* ‘to tear open’ 袋口 *dàikǒu* ‘bag, package’

剪开 *jiǎnkāi* ‘to cut open (with scissors)’

or even

咬开 *yǎokāi* ‘to tear open with one’s teeth’

If we turn to its meaning ‘away’, we find the following established lexemes:

避开 *bìkāi* ‘to avoid’ 目光 *mùguāng* ‘look, gaze (of someone)’

避开 *bìkāi* ‘to avoid’ 麻烦 *máfan* ‘trouble’

躲开 *duǒkāi* ‘to evade’

闪开 *shǎnkāi* ‘to dodge’

让开 *ràngkāi* ‘to step aside’ as in 车来了，快躲开/闪开/让开！*chē lái le | kuài duǒkāi / shǎnkāi / ràngkāi* ‘a car is coming, keep out of the way!’

走开 *zǒukāi* ‘to go away’

离开 *líkāi* ‘to leave (a place)’

滚开 *gǔnkāi* ‘scram, shove off, beat it’ (滚 *gǔn* ‘lit. to roll’)

But ad hoc combinations can be contrived in given situations with this meaning too:

拿开 *nákāi* ‘to remove, take away’ 请把你的背包拿开 *qǐng bǎ nǐ de bēibāo nákāi* ‘Please move your rucksack/knapsack out of the way’

推开 *tuīkāi* ‘to push away’ (把它) 推开 *(bǎ tā) tuīkāi* ‘to push it away’

搬开 *bānkāi* ‘to move elsewhere’ (把它) 搬开 *(bǎ tā) bānkāi* ‘move it somewhere else’

抬开 *táikāi* ‘to lift and carry away (by two or more people)’ (把它)

抬开 *(bǎ tā) táikāi* ‘carry it away’

开 *kāi* in these lexemes implies movement only over a short distance. For greater distances, the ‘resultant state verb’ 走 *zǒu* ‘away to a different place’ is employed, as in 拿走 *názǒu*, 带走 *dàizǒu*, 搬走 *bānzǒu*, 抬走 *táizǒu*, 运走 *yùnzǒu*, etc.

It must be noted, however, that these ad hoc words are rarely used figuratively.

If meaning allows, the validity of a complemental lexeme may be confirmed if it can be converted to the potential form by the insertion of 得 *de* or 不 *bu* between the two morphemes.

鞋带绑得太紧，解不开了。

xiédài bǎng de tài jǐn | jiěbukāi le

‘(My) shoe laces are tied so tightly, (I) can’t undo them.’

这几天实在太忙，真的走不开。

zhè jǐ tiān shízài tài máng | zhēn de zǒubukāi

‘I am honestly too busy at the moment and I really can’t get away.’

他每天工作，一刻也离不开电脑。

tā měitiān gōngzuò | yīkè yě líbukāi diànnǎo

‘To carry out his work from day to day, he can’t be without his computer even for a moment.’

她经常失眠，要吃安眠药才睡得着。

tā jīngcháng shīmián | yào chī ānmiányào cái shuìdezháo

‘She regularly suffers from insomnia and has to take sleeping pills before she can get to sleep.’

这件行李那么重，你一个人搬得动吗？

zhè jiàn xínglǐ nàme zhòng | nǐ yī gè rén bāndédòng ma

‘This baggage is so heavy, can you carry it by yourself?’

29.2.5.2 The internal AB or AA relationship between the verb and its complement

Now we will turn our attention to the intrinsic relationship between the first verb and its ‘resultant state’ verb counterpart in a complemental lexeme.

Let us first take the example of cracking nuts. One may ‘crack them (open)’ (把它们) 砸开 **zákāi** using a nutcracker or some other instrument. So the relationship between 砸 **zá** and 开 **kāi** can be said to be A (the initiator of the action) 砸 **zá** and B (the nut, the recipient of the action) 开 **kāi**. But of course the nut may ‘split or crack open’ itself 裂开 **lièkāi**, when it is dry. The relationship between 裂 **liè** and 开 **kāi** then becomes A 裂 **liè** and A 开 **kāi**.

Similarly, a balloon may float away if you let go of it: 气球飘走了 **qìqiú piāozǒu le**. ‘The balloon floated away in the air.’ In this case, the relationship between 飘 **piāo** and 走 **zǒu** is again AA.

The distinction between AB-related and AA-related complemental lexemes is that the former can be used in 把 or 被 constructions, while the latter cannot. For example,

一阵大风把晾着的衣服吹走了。

yī zhèn dàfēng bǎ liàng zhe de yīfu chuīzǒu le

lit. a mw big wind cv:**ba** dry in the sun **zhe de** clothes blow depart **le**
'A strong wind blew away the clothes that were out drying.'

信被他拆开了

xìn bèi tā chāikāi le

lit. letter cv:**bei** him tear open **le**
'The letter was opened by him.'

*孩子把气球飘走了。 **háizi bǎ qìqiú piāozǒu le**

But 孩子松开手，把气球放走了。

Háizi sōngkāi shǒu, bǎ qìqiú fàngzǒu le

Lit. child loosen open hand, cv:**ba** balloon release leave **le**
'The child loosened his grip and let go of the balloon.'

*核桃被他裂开了。 **hétao bèi tā lièkāi le**

But 核桃被他用钳子砸开了。

hétao cv:bèi tā yòng qiánzi zákāi le

lit. walnut **bei** him use pincers break open **le**
'The walnut was cracked open by him with some pincers.'

We may therefore conclude that an AB-related complemental lexeme may feature in the following macrosyntactic structures:

S V C O 一阵大风吹走了晾着的衣服。

yī zhèn dàfēng chuīzǒu le liàngzhe de yīfu

lit. a mw big wind blow depart **le** dry in the sun **zhe de** clothes
'A strong wind blew away the clothes that were out drying.'

S 把 O V C 一阵大风把晾着的衣服吹走了。

yī zhèn dàfēng bǎ liàngzhe de yīfu chuīzǒu le

lit. a mw big wind cv:**ba** dry in the sun **zhe de** clothes blow depart **le**
'A strong wind blew away the clothes that were out drying.'

O 被 S V C 晾着的衣服被一阵大风吹走了。

liàng zhe de yīfu bèi yī zhèn dàfēng chuīzǒu le

lit. dry in the sun **zhe de** clothes cv:**bei** a big wind blow depart **le**
'The clothes that were out drying were blown away by a strong wind.'

Also:

T S V C (topic-subject structure)

包裹他寄走了。 **bāoguǒ tā jìzǒu le**

lit. parcel he send depart **le** 'He sent the parcel.'

晾着的衣服一阵大风吹走了。

liàng zhe de yīfu yī zhèn dàfēng chuīzǒu le

lit. dry in the sun **zhe de** clothes a big wind blow depart **le**

‘A strong wind blew away the clothes that were out drying.’

T V C (notional passive)

包裹寄走了。**bāoguǒ jìzǒu le**

lit. parcel send depart **le** ‘The parcel has been sent.’

晾着的衣服吹走了。**liàng zhe de yīfu chuīzǒu le**

lit. dry in the sun **zhe de** clothes blow depart **le**

‘The clothes that were out drying have been blown away.’

On the other hand, an AA-related complemental lexeme may feature only in the following macrosyntactic structure:

S V C

气球飘走了。**qìqiú piāozǒu le**

lit. balloon float depart **le** ‘The balloon floated away.’

29.2.5.3 A closer look at the complement in a complemental lexeme

In Morphology and Syntax (I), we have already seen that the C in a complemental lexeme can be an adjective or a so-called ‘resultant state’ verb. However, in actual practice, it is difficult to distinguish between the two, particularly when the sentence closes with the expository 了 **le**. Here, we have two sets of simple sentences:

剩菜馊了。**shèngcài sōu le** ‘The leftovers smell a bit off.’

糖饧了。**táng xíng le** ‘The sweets have turned soft/sticky.’

面包霉了。**miànbāo méi le** ‘The bread has gone mouldy.’

水管锈了。**shuǐguǎn xiù le** ‘The pipes are rusty.’

螺丝扣勤了。**luósīkòu yì le** ‘The threads of the screw are worn/blunt.’

衣服破了。**yīfu pò le** ‘The clothes are tattered.’

手杖断了。**shǒuzhàng duàn le** ‘The walking stick is broken.’

她病了。**tā bìng le** ‘He is ill.’

花儿蔫了。**huār niān le** ‘The flowers have withered.’

樱桃熟了。**yīngtáo shú le** ‘The cherries are ripe.’

她的病好了。**tāde bìng hǎo le** ‘His illness is better.’

他饿了。**tā è le** ‘He is hungry.’

你瘦了。**nǐ shòu le** ‘You are thinner/you have lost weight.’

我老了。**wǒ lǎo le** ‘I am old, I am getting on.’

孩子大了。 **háizi dà le** 'The child is bigger.'
草绿了。 **cǎo lǜ le** 'The grass has gone green.'
树叶黄了。 **shù yè huáng le** 'The leaves have turned brown.'
饭焦了。 **fàn jiāo le** 'The food is burnt.'
画儿歪了。 **huà er wāi le** 'The painting/picture is crooked, not straight.'

It does not really matter whether intuitively you regard the word 破 **pò** 'broken, worn' in 衣服破了 **yīfu pò le** as a 'resultant state' verb and the word 好 **hǎo** 'good, well' in 她的病好了 **tāde bìng hǎo le** as an adjective. The association with 了 **le** invariably implies an underlying process of change, that is, from 'being originally intact to being worn' in the first case and from 'being ill to being well' in the second.

It is only when it is necessary to indicate the cause starting that process that an appropriate verb for the situation in hand has to be found.

剩菜搁馊了。 **shèngcài gē sōu le** 'The leftovers have been kept/stored and gone off.'
衣服穿破了。 **yīfu chuān pò le** 'The clothes are worn out.'
她累病了。 **tā lèi bìng le** 'She is ill from working too hard.'
她的病治/医好了。 **tāde bìng zhì/yī hǎo le** 'His illness has been cured.'
孩子长大了。 **háizi zhǎng dà le** 'The child has grown bigger.'
饭烧焦了。 **fàn shāo jiāo le** 'The food has been scorched.'
画儿挂歪了。 **huà er guà wāi le** 'The painting/picture has not been hung straight.'

If no appropriate verb can be found, the general terms 弄 **nòng** or 搞 **gǎo** can be used (see Morphology and Syntax (I)).

谁把手杖弄/搞断了? **shéi bǎ shǒuzhàng nòng/gǎo duàn le**
'Who broke the walking stick?'

In some cases, the adjective and the resultant state verb are blended in the one expression:

水管锈了。 **shuǐguǎn xiù le** 'The pipes have gone rusty.'
螺丝扣勒了。 **luósīkòu yì le** 'The threads of the screw have worn out.'
他饿了。 **tā è le** 'He is starving.'
饭得了。 **fàn dé le** 'Dinner is ready.'

Disyllabic constructions can be formed by using lexemes from other combinations:

Using a governmental lexeme:

水管生锈了。 **shuǐguǎn shēngxiù le** 'The pipes have gone rusty.'

(生 **shēng** 'to grow')

面包发霉了。 **miànbāo fāméi le** 'The bread has gone mouldy.'

(发 **fā** 'to turn, to get')

牛奶变酸了。 **niúnnǎi biàn suān le** 'The milk has gone sour.'

(变 **biàn** 'to become, change')

树叶变黄了。 **shù yè biàn huáng le** 'The leaves have turned brown.'

Using a juxtapositional lexeme:

水管锈蚀了。 **shuǐguǎn xiùshí le** 'The pipes have gone rusty.'

(蚀 **shí** 'to erode')

面包霉烂了。 **miànbāo méilàn le** 'The bread has gone mouldy.'

(烂 **làn** 'decayed')

Using a different complemental lexeme:

她病倒了。 **tā bìngdǎo le** 'She has fallen ill.' (病 **bìng** 'ill', 倒 **dǎo** 'to collapse')

饿死我了。 **è sǐ wǒ le** 'I am dying of hunger.' (饿 **è** 'hungry', 死 **sǐ** 'to die')

However, in most cases, there is an underlying human agent who is not apparent from the surface structure. Take the following examples:

面包烤焦了。 **miànbāo kǎo jiāo le**

'The bread has burnt (in the oven).'

Here, there must have been someone who baked the bread before it was burnt. In fact, this expository sentence is derived from the original narrative: 他/她烤焦了面包 **tā kǎo jiāo le miànbāo** ('He/she burnt the bread.'), or, if the action was not intentional, 他/她把面包给烤焦了 **tā bǎ miànbāo gěi kǎo jiāo le** or 面包让他/她给烤焦了 **miànbāo ràng tā gěi kǎo jiāo le** ('The bread was burnt by him/her.').

照片贴歪了。 **zhàopiàn tiē wāi le**

'The photographs are not stuck in straight.'

The fact that the photographs do not appear to be straight is because the person who stuck them into the album was not careful enough. This expository sentence also derives from a narrative sentence like: 他/她不小心把照片给贴歪了 **tā bù xiǎoxīn bǎ zhàopiàn gěi tiē wāi le** ('He/she carelessly did not stick the photographs in straight.').

It can be seen, therefore, that the original narrative usually takes an AABB format:

她烤焦了面包。 **tā kǎojiāo le miànbāo**

A A B B

A did the baking, and B was burnt.

And the transformed expository usually follows a BAB format:

面包烤焦了。 **miànbāo kǎo jiāo le**

B A B

And, likewise, the narrative:

他贴歪了照片。 **tā tiēwāi le zhàopiàn**

A A B B

A stuck the photos onto the album, and B, the photos, were not straight.

And the transformed expository:

照片贴歪了。 **zhàopiàn tiē wāi le**

B A B

Similarly,

消防员扑灭了大火。 **xiāofángyuán pūmiè le dàhuǒ**

'The fireman extinguished the fire.'

A A B B

A, the firemen did the extinguishing, and B, the fire, was extinguished.

大火扑灭了。 **dàhuǒ pūmiè le**

B A B

But if the original B indicates a place, and the C is a complement like 满 mǎn 'full', then both the original and the transformed become narratives, and an additional A is introduced into the transformed version:

乘客挤满了车厢。 **chéngkè jǐmǎn le chēxiāng**

'The passengers filled the compartment.'

A A B B

车厢里挤满了乘客。 **chēxiāng lǐ jǐmǎn le chéngkè**

'The compartment was filled with passengers.'

B li A B A

Where B is followed by a postposition like 里 li or 中 zhōng, indicating location, an A B A transformed narrative is the most prevalent version:

礼堂里坐满了人。 **lǐtáng li zuòmǎn le rén**

'The auditorium was filled with people.'

B li A B A

天空中布满了乌云。 **tiānkōng zhōng bùmǎn le wūyún**

'The sky was covered with dark clouds.'

B zhōng A B A

But often the human agent of the action is not identified, and the format then becomes B (with location postposition) A B C:

桌子上堆满了东西。 **zhuōzi shàng duīmǎn le dōngxi**

'The table was heaped with things.'

B shàng A B C

杯子里倒满了啤酒。 **bēizi li dào mǎn le píjiǔ**

'The glass was (poured) full of beer.'

B li A B C

箱子里塞满了衣服。 **xiāngzi li sāimǎn le yīfu**

'The case/trunk was stuffed full of clothes.'

B li A B C

Before we end our discussion, we must point out that the C in a complementary structure, though not necessarily always a lexeme, may sometimes be a disyllabic expression, as if the VC formulation is an established collocation. For example,

道理我已经说明白了。

dàolǐ wǒ yǐjīng shuō míngbái le (说明白 **shuō míngbái** 'to make clear')

'The reason I have already made clear.'

地已经扫干净了。

dì yǐjīng sǎo gānjīng le (扫干净 **sǎo gānjīng** 'to sweep clean')

'The floor has already been swept clean.'

窗户关严实了没有?

chuānghu guān yánshí le méiyǒu (关严实 **guān yánshí** 'to close tightly/firmly')

'Have the windows been closed tightly?'

你要的东西我都替你备齐全了。

nǐ yào de dōngxi wǒ dōu tì nǐ bèi qíquán le (备齐全 **bèi qíquán** 'to get everything ready')

'I have got ready for you all the things you want.'

那首歌他唱走调了。

nèi shǒu gē tā chàng zǒudiào le (唱走调 **chàng zǒudiào** ‘to sing out of tune’)

‘He sang that song out of tune.’

上面那两句你抄串行了。

shàngmiàn nà liǎng jù nǐ chāo chuànháng le (抄串行 **chāo chuànháng** ‘to jump a line whilst copying’)

‘You jumped a line while copying those two sentences above.’

今早我睡过头了。

jīn zǎo wǒ shuì guòtóu le (睡过头 **shuì guòtóu** ‘to oversleep’)
‘I overslept this morning.’

29.2.5.4 *Versatility in the coinage of complemental constructions*

In fact, C in a complemental lexeme can play a versatile role in syntactic constructions, and ad hoc yet grammatically legitimate utterances like the following occur:

这件事儿你想私了。

zhèi jiàn shì nǐ xiǎng sī le

‘You are thinking about this matter in a self-interested way/only in terms of your own interests.’

Here, 想私 **xiǎng sī** (lit. ‘to think selfish’) follows the same pattern as lexemes such as 想错了 **xiǎng cuò le** ‘to think in the wrong way’, 想苦了 **xiǎng kǔ le** ‘to think so much about’, 想疯了 **xiǎng fēng le** ‘to be mad about’, etc.

Similarly,

他把那杯茶碰洒了。**tā bǎ nài bēi chá pèng sǎ le**

‘He knocked over and spilt that cup of tea.’

In this case, 洒 **sǎ** ‘spilt’, as an indicator of result, is similar to 破 **pò** ‘broken’, 断 **duàn** ‘broken in two’ etc, which we have seen in earlier examples.

And:

这件衣服的颜色快退没了。

zhèi jiàn yīfu de yánsè kuài tuì méi le

‘The colour of this piece of clothing soon faded.’

29.3 Syntactic economy and retrieval system

As we have seen from all the above, Chinese syntax operates on the basis of a precise and subtle system, and any violation of this system is quickly identified. The suggestion that Chinese language usage is ‘random’ is badly misplaced. At the heart of this system is the ‘principle of economy’. A sentence like the following illustrates the idiomatic surface structure and its underlying meaning:

这个节目播到几点完?

zhèi gè jiémù bō dào jǐ diǎn wán

‘This programme is transmitted up to what time?’

It is, in fact, based on the following underlying structures:

电台 **diàntái S** ‘broadcasting station’

播这个节目 **bō zhèi gè jiémù VO** ‘to transmit this programme’

播到几点 **bō dào jǐ diǎn VC** ‘to transmit up to what time’

播完 **bō wán VC** ‘to finish transmitting’

The retrieval system has to pursue a succession of verb phrases. The complete version, fully spelt out, would be:

电台播这个节目播到几点播完?

diàntái bō zhèi gè jiémù bō dào jǐ diǎn bō wán

‘The broadcasting station transmits this programme, transmits it till what time, and finishes transmitting it.’

When what is contextually understood and what is repeated is removed, we arrive at what we saw at the beginning: a truncated yet perfectly well-formed sentence.

Further pruning, beyond this, is possible and perfectly acceptable:

这个节目几点播完?

zhèi gè jiémù jǐ diǎn bō wán

‘When does the transmission of this programme finish?’

Conjunctions that introduce time or supposition are also often removed from the surface structure.⁶ The retrieval system here is to access again the absent conjunctions with reference to the underlying intended meaning. The English translations for the examples below indicate what is missing.

⁶ See the chapter on interlingual conversions.

- (a) 你考完试准备去哪儿度假?

nǐ kǎo wán shì zhǔnbèi qù nǎr dùjià

'Where are you planning to go for a holiday when you finish your examinations?'

你 **nǐ S** 'you'

考完试 **kǎo wán shì VCO** [之后 **zhīhòu** 'after that'] [after]
finish examinations

准备去哪儿 **zhǔnbèi qù nǎr mv VO** 'plan to get where'
度假 **dùjià VO** 'to have a holiday'

- (b) 你不带雨伞下雨怎么办?

nǐ bù dài yǔsǎn xià yǔ zěnme bàn

'If you don't take an umbrella, what will you do if it rains?'

你 **nǐ S** 'you'

[如果 **rúguǒ** 'if'] 不带雨伞 **bù dài yǔsǎn neg VO** '[If] not take
umbrella'

[如果 **rúguǒ** 'if'] 下雨 **xià yǔ VO** [的话 **dehuà**] '[If] it rains [if]'
怎么办 **zěnme bàn Ad V** 'What is to be done?'

- (c) 搬不动不要硬搬。

bānbudòng bù yào yìng bān

'If you can't move it, don't insist on trying/moving it.'

This piece of advice is apparently directed at a person present in the context. Something, which is supposed to be moved elsewhere, is also obviously there. However, they are both left out from what is said. The first part of the utterance is a supposition. What is indicated is that, if the supposition is correct, then a subsequent action should not take place. The underlying sentence when fully spelt out may sound something like this:

[这件行李 **zhèi jiàn xíngli**] (or something else that is clear from
the context) 'this piece of luggage'

[假如你 **jiǎrú nǐ**] 搬不动 **bānbudòng** [(的话 **dehuà**)] 'if you
cannot move it'

[你就 **nǐ jiù**] 不要硬搬。 **bù yào yìng bān** 'then don't insist on
moving it'

- (d) 你穿上这件衣服保证好看。

nǐ chuān shàng zhèi jiàn yīfu bǎozhèng hǎokàn

'If you put on this outfit, you are bound to look good.'

Here, the underlying construction could be construed as:

[要是 **yàoshi**] 你穿上这件衣服 **nǐ chuān shàng zhèi jiàn yīfu**

'if you put on this piece of clothing'

[我敢向你 **wǒ gǎn xiàng nǐ**] 保证 **bǎozhèng** 'I dare guarantee to you'

[你一定 **nǐ yīdìng**] 好看 **hǎokàn** 'you certainly will be attractive'

- (e) 你来闻一下香不香?

nǐ lái wén yī xià xiāng bù xiāng

'Come and have a smell to see whether it has a pleasant scent.'

In this case, the issue is whether a bouquet of flowers or a bottle of perfume is sweet-smelling:

你来闻一下 **nǐ lái wén yī xià** '(you) come and have a smell of'

[这束花儿 **zhèi shū huār** 'this bunch of flowers' or 这瓶香水

zhèi píng xiāngshuǐ 'this bottle of perfume']

[并且 **bìngqiě** 'and']

[看看 **kànkàn** '(to) see or decide']

[这些花 **zhèi xiē huā** 'these flowers' or 这种香水 **zhèi zhǒng**

xiāngshuǐ 'this perfume']

香不香 **xiāng bù xiāng** 'sweet or not'

- (f) 从前学过小提琴，搁了十几年不拉，现在都不会拉了。

cóngqián xuéguo xiǎotíqín | gē le shí jǐ nián bù lā | xiànzài

dōu bù huì lā le

'In the past I learnt the violin, but gave it up for ten or so years, and now I can't play at all.'

This is a typical Chinese sentence, which, as we indicated at the beginning of the chapter, consists of three SVO theoretical constructs with contextual and cotextual omissions in each one of them. The two commas, in fact, serve as conjunctive pauses. A plausible underlying construction when fully spelt out would be something like this:

[我 **wǒ** 'I'] 从前学过小提琴 **cóngqián xuéguo xiǎotíqín**

'I in the past learnt the violin'

[可是 **kěshì** 'yet'] [我把它 **wǒ bǎ tā**] 搁了十几年不拉 **gē le**

shí jǐ nián bù lā '[but I grasping it] put on one side ten and more years not play'

[因此 **yīncǐ** 'so'] [我 **wǒ** 'I'] 现在都不会拉 **xiànzài dōu bù huì lā**
[小提琴 **xiǎotíqín** 'violin'] 了 **le** [therefore I] now not able at
all play [violin] any more'

To sum up, what is apparently omitted from these sentences can always be retrieved from the immediate context and can also be recovered from the logic of the particular sequence or situation.

Intralingual transpositions

By intralingual transpositions, we mean that there can be a number of ways of saying the same thing (or nearly the same thing) within the same language. These variations can be expressed in different grammatical forms. They come naturally to the native speaker, but their function and structure merit analysis.

First, what features of a language make it possible to offer variable forms of expression, and second, what motivates the speaker of a language to adopt one form rather than another in particular contexts? Are there underlying rules that govern their choice? These are the questions we set out to answer in this chapter with reference to Chinese syntax.

30.1 Options influenced by different modes of expression

When we speak, we are often consciously or subconsciously prompted to narrate an event, describe an impression, explain an idea, or comment on something. These conscious or subconscious cues lead us to formulate what we wish to say. Sometimes in response to another speaker or an immediate context, a particular idea couched in the form of a specific word or expression comes into our heads. Once this word or expression is in our mind, the rest of our utterance is already to some extent syntactically determined. In other words, the choice has been made and the other viable options are closed.

In the following sections, we shall first focus on potential modes of expression that communicate more or less similar ideas, and then go on to see how the use of a different word as a sentence beginner (or point of departure) may affect the overall structure or acceptability of an utterance that gives the same piece of information.

30.1.1 Narrating an action or stating a fact

Here are two typical constructions in Chinese, one incorporating 把 *bǎ* and the other 被 *bèi*:

她把土豆削了皮。 **tā bǎ tǔdòu xiāo le pí**
(lit. she cv:*ba* potato peel *le* skin)
She peeled the potatoes.

土豆被她削了皮。 **tǔdòu bèi tā xiāo le pí**
(lit. potatoes cv:*bei* her peel *le* skin)
The potatoes were peeled by her.

Both sentences narrate an action most likely taking place in the kitchen, the first having the subject 她 *tā* ‘she’, who initiates the action of peeling, and the second the subject 土豆 *tǔdòu* ‘potato’, which undergoes the action of being peeled. Though the two sentences have a different point of departure, they nevertheless encode exactly the same information that somebody is doing something to the potatoes. The first is commonly known as an active voice sentence and the second, a passive voice sentence, and they obviously express two sides of the same idea. Their grammatical function, as we know, is to narrate an incident: they are narrative sentences.

Now, if we take away the bracketed parts of the two sentences:

[她把]土豆削了皮。 **[tā bǎ] tǔdòu xiāo le pí**
土豆[被她]削了皮。 **tǔdòu [bèi tā] xiāo le pí**

we are left with the same sequence of words 土豆削了皮 *tǔdòu xiāo le pí*. If we add the sentence particle 了 *le* to the end of the sequence, we create a *le*-expository sentence, which states a newly emerged situation or fact:

土豆削了皮了。 **tǔdòu xiāo le pí le**
(lit. potatoes peel *le* skin *le*)
The potatoes are peeled/have been peeled.

As we know, sentences of this type account for most of the sentences in Chinese that start with a non-human grammatical subject. The marker of a formal passive 被 *bèi* need not always be present (unlike English, which has to mark the passive), particularly when the speaker is not narrating an incident but merely stating a fact. A non-human subject with a verbal predicate that describes the related situation will in most cases naturally be the recipient (or patient) of the action expressed in the verb rather than its initiator (or agent).

Now, suppose we remove the two grammatical words 把 *bǎ* and 被 *bèi* and keep the rest of the sentences intact, i.e. leaving the pronoun present:

她[把]土豆削了皮。 *tā [bǎ] tǔdòu xiāo le pí*
土豆[被]她削了皮。 *tǔdòu [bèi] tā xiāo le pí*

and then add the sentence particle 了 *le* at the end. We then create another set of two related constructions in Chinese where the initiator and the recipient of the verb are both present in the subject slot:

她土豆削了皮了。 *tā tǔdòu xiāo le pí le*
(lit. she potatoes peel *le* skin *le*)

土豆她削了皮了。 *tǔdòu tā xiāo le pí le*
(lit. potatoes she peel *le* skin *le*)

The difference between the two is not immediately apparent until we use them in context. For instance, if you are helping out in the kitchen, you might say one of the following (obviously with a change of pronoun):

我土豆削了皮了，还有什么要帮忙的吗？
wǒ tǔdòu xiāo le pí le | háiyǒu shénme yào bāngmáng
de ma
(lit. I potatoes peel *le* skin *le*. Still is there anything needs help *de ma*?)
I have peeled the potatoes. Is there anything else you need help
with/Is there anything else I can do to help?

土豆我削了皮了，要放到锅里去煮吗？
tǔdòu wǒ xiāo le pí le | yào fàng dào guō lǐ qù zhǔ ma
(lit. potatoes I peel *le* skin *le*, want/need put pot-inside go boil *ma*?)
I have peeled the potatoes. Do you want me to put them into the pot
to boil/on to boil?

In the first sentence we sense that with the initiator subject preceding the recipient topic a contrast is invited in relation to the topicalized recipient. It is natural, therefore, for the speaker, having said that he has peeled the potatoes, to ask whether there is anything else that needs to be done.

However, in the second sentence, where the recipient topic precedes the initiator subject, the topicalized recipient is the main focus and the follow-up question naturally relates to it. The inclusion of an initiator subject is actually inconsequential: it helps only to highlight the fact that the potatoes have been peeled. It does not affect what occupies the speaker's mind, that is, now that the potatoes have been peeled, should they be put into the pot to boil.

The prototypical sentence behind all the variants discussed above in an SVO language like Chinese is of course a narrative sentence like the following:

她削了土豆的皮。

tā xiāo le tǔdòu de pí

(lit. she peel **le** potatoes **de** skin)

She peeled the potatoes.

But that does not mean that this prototypical sentence must be the most typical utterance in the whole group that communicates this particular piece of information, nor does it mean that this must be the most frequently used one amongst all its variations.

30.1.2 The core structure behind 把 **bǎ** and 被 **bèi**

The 把 **bǎ** and 被 **bèi** constructions are intrinsically the two sides of the same structure. When they come together in the same utterance, we can identify this structure.

If we look at the two constructions again:

她把土豆削了皮。 **tā bǎ tǔdòu xiāo le pí**

(lit. she cv:**ba** potatoes peel **le** skin)

She peeled the potatoes.

土豆被她削了皮。 **tǔdòu bèi tā xiāo le pí**

(lit. potatoes cv:**bei** her peel **le** skin)

The potatoes were peeled by her.

we will see how we may merge or amalgamate the two constructions into one and retrieve the core structure:

土豆被她把皮(给)削了。

tǔdòu bèi tā bǎ pí (gěi) xiāo le

(lit. potatoes cv:**bei** her **ba** skin (**gei**) peel **le**)

The potatoes were peeled by her.¹

¹ In Chinese, 削皮 **xiāo pí** 'to peel the skin' is a VO (i.e. 'verb + object') construction, which is replaced by the English word 'to peel' in the translation. If translated as 'The skins of the potatoes have been peeled', the sentence will sound a little forced. In addition, the use of 把 **bǎ** and 被 **bèi** within one sentence, which merges the active and the passive and which is acceptable in Chinese, has to be translated into the passive voice in English.

The outcome, as we can see, is a well-formed sentence, on which many similar sets of utterances may be modelled:

- (1) 风把他的帽子(给)吹跑了。

fēng bǎ tā de màozi (gěi) chuī pǎo le

(lit. wind cv:**ba** his hat (**gei**) blow away **le**)

The wind blew his hat off.

- (2) 他的帽子被风(给)吹跑了。

tā de màozi bèi fēng (gěi) chuī pǎo le

(lit. his hat cv:**bei** wind (**gei**) blow away **le**)

His hat was blown off by the wind.

> 他被风把帽子(给)吹跑了。

tā bèi fēng bǎ màozi (gěi) chuī pǎo le

(he cv:**bei** wind cv:**ba** hat (**gei**) blow away **le**)

His hat was blown off by the wind.

- (3) 一场大雨把她身上的衣服全淋湿了。

yī cháng dà yǔ bǎ tā shēn shàng de yīfu quán lín shī le

(lit. a heavy rain storm **ba** her body-on clothes all pour wet **le**)

A heavy rain storm soaked everything she had on.

她身上的衣服全被一场大雨淋湿了。

tā shēn shàng de yīfu quán bèi yī cháng dà yǔ lín shī le

(lit. her body-on clothes all cv:**bei** a heavy rain storm pour wet **le**)

Everything she had on was soaked by a heavy rain storm.

> 她被一场大雨把身上的衣服全淋湿了。

tā bèi yī cháng dà yǔ bǎ tā shēn shàng de yīfu quán lín shī le

(lit. she **bei** a heavy rain storm **ba** her body-on clothes all pour wet **le**)

Everything she had on was soaked by a heavy rain storm.

- (4) 老师把艾米莉画的画儿贴在了²教室的墙上。

lǎoshī bǎ àimǐlǐ huà de huàr tiē zài le jiàoshì de qiáng shàng

(lit. teacher cv:**ba** Emily paint **de** picture post-on **le** classroom **de** wall-on)

The teacher put the picture Emily had painted on the classroom wall.

² The aspect marker 了 **le** must come between the coverb 在 **zài** and the locational object. The sentence will be unacceptable if it comes straight after the verb 贴 **tiē**: e.g. *老师把艾米莉画的画儿贴在了教室的墙上。 **lǎoshī bǎ àimǐlǐ huà de huàr tiē le zài jiàoshì de qiáng shàng.**

艾米莉画的画儿被老师贴在了教室的墙上。

àimǐlǐ huà de huàr bèi lǎoshī tiē zài le jiàoshì de qiáng shàng
(lit. Emily paint **de** picture cv:**bei** teacher post-on **le** classroom **de** wall-on)
The picture Emily had painted was put on the classroom wall by the teacher.

> 艾米莉被老师把她画的画儿贴在了教室的墙上。

àimǐlǐ bèi lǎoshī bǎ tā huà de huàr tiē zài le jiàoshì de qiáng shàng

(lit. Emily cv:**bei** teacher cv:**ba** she paint **de** picture post-on **le** classroom **de** wall-on)

The picture Emily had painted was put on the classroom wall by the teacher.

These are all narrative sentences, and the 了 **le** at the end of the first two of them is both aspect-marker and a sentence-particle. If it is understood to be functioning primarily as a sentence particle, the utterances may of course be regarded as expository sentences.

The prototypical originals of the first two sentences are respectively:

风吹跑了他的帽子。 **fēng chuī pǎo le tā de màozi**

The wind blew off his hat

一场大雨淋湿了她身上的衣服。

yī cháng dà yǔ lín shī le tā shēn shàng de yīfu

A rain storm soaked the clothes she was wearing.

It can be seen that 了 **le** is positioned in the middle of the two narrative sentences, marking the complete aspect of the two verbal phrases 吹跑 **chuī pǎo** 'to blow off' and 淋湿 **lín shī** '(of rain) to pour down and make wet.'

In the last sentence, the complement 在教室的墙上 **zài jiàoshì de qiáng shàng** 'on the classroom wall', because of its length, cannot be a complement in its reformulation (as a well-formed sentence) but has to be re-designated as an adverbial or coverbal phrase in order to constitute a fully acceptable SVO prototypical construction:

†老师贴在了教室的墙上艾米莉画的画儿。(SVCO)

lǎoshī tiē zài le jiàoshì de qiáng shàng àimǐlǐ huà de huàr

(lit. teacher post-on **le** classroom **de** wall-on Emily paint **de** picture)

The teacher put on the classroom wall the picture Emily had painted.

*老师贴了艾米莉画的画儿在教室的墙上。(SVOC)

lǎoshī tiē le àimǐlǐ huà de huàr zài jiàoshì de qiáng shàng

(lit. teacher post **le** Emily paint **de** picture on classroom **de** wall-on)

The teacher put the picture Emily had painted on the classroom wall.

老师在教室的墙上贴了艾米莉画的画儿。(SAVO)

lǎoshī zài jiàoshì de qiáng shàng tiē le àimǐlǐ huà de huàr

(lit. teacher cv:zai classroom **de** wall-on post **le** Emily paint **de** picture)

The teacher on the classroom wall put the picture Emily had painted.

30.1.3 Transition from a narrative into a description

If we delete, as we did before, 把 **bǎ** and 被 **bèi** together with the initiator or agent of the action 贴 **tiē** ‘to put or post’, that is, the teacher, who is the grammatical subject in the first sentence and the grammatical object of the coverb 被 **bèi** in the second,

[老师把]艾米莉画的画儿贴在了教室的墙上。

[lǎoshī bǎ] àimǐlǐ huà de huàr tiē zài le jiàoshì de qiáng shàng

艾米莉画的画儿[被老师]贴在了教室的墙上。

àimǐlǐ huà de huàr [bèi lǎoshī] tiē zài le jiàoshì de qiáng shàng

in both cases, we are left with:

艾米莉画的画儿贴在了教室的墙上。

àimǐlǐ huà de huàr tiē zài le jiàoshì de qiáng shàng

If we also remove 了 **le**, the sentence becomes a descriptive one indicating the existence of Emily’s picture on the wall rather than a narrative recounting the action of the teacher putting her picture on the wall. 了 **le**, being the remnant of an aspect marker associated with the completed action of ‘putting up something on the wall’, is no longer important. The pared down sentence is clearly descriptive and has no loss of meaning:

艾米莉画的画儿贴在教室的墙上。

àimǐlǐ huà de huàr tiē zài jiàoshì de qiáng shàng

The picture Emily painted is (put) on the wall.

As a descriptive sentence depicting the existence of something in a location, it can also be reformulated with the location phrase at the beginning:

(在)教室的墙上贴了/贴着艾米莉画的画儿。

(zài) jiàoshì de qiáng shàng tiē le/tiē zhe àimǐlǐ huà de huàr

(lit. (cv:zai) classroom **de** wall-on post **le/post zhe** Emily paint **de** picture)

On the classroom wall is (posted) the picture Emily painted.

Here, we must take note of two things: first, the coverb 在 *zài* ‘at, in, etc.’ is usually left out if the location phrase features as a sentence beginner; and second, the boundary between 了 *le* and 着 *zhe* is blurred: in other words, the continued state of ‘something being posted on the wall’ is no different from the resultant occurrence of ‘something having been posted on the wall.’

The fundamental format for this description is perhaps best expressed as:

教室的墙上贴着艾米莉画的画儿。

jiàoshì de qiáng shàng tiē zhe àimǐlí huà de huàr

On the classroom wall is (posted) the picture Emily painted.

We must not of course forget its equally valid yet less verbally balanced and perhaps less frequently used variation:

艾米莉画的画儿在教室的墙上贴着。

àimǐlí huà de huàr zài jiàoshì de qiáng shàng tiē zhe

On the classroom wall is (posted) the picture Emily painted.

So we see that the transition from a narrative to a description is a simple step from narrating an action to describing its resultant state.

However, before we leave this section, we must point out that this simple step of transition from narration to description in fact consists of a set of intermediate and more or less indeterminate constructions, which gradually transmute from total narration (i.e. a full 被 *bèi* construction complete with the coverbal passive marker and its agent) to total description (i.e. a notional passive construction without any passive marker).

We know that in a 被 *bèi* construction, the grammatical object of the coverb is actually the underlying initiator or agent of the action expressed in the verb. If the agent cannot be identified, 谁 *shuí/shéi* ‘somebody’ or 人 *rén* ‘someone’ is introduced, and, without a known agent, the resultant sentence becomes less narrative if not totally descriptive:

艾米莉画的画儿被谁/人贴在(了)教室的墙上。

àimǐlí huà de huàr bèi shéi/rén tiē zài (le) jiàoshì de qiáng shàng

(lit. Emily paint *de* picture cv:*bei* someone post-on *le* classroom *de* wall-on)

The picture Emily painted was put/posted on the classroom wall by someone.

If the agent is unknown, the coverb 被 *bèi* is left to stand on its own, and the truncated passive construction then becomes more descriptive than narrative:

艾米莉画的画儿被贴在(了)教室的墙上。

àimílǐ huà de huàr bèi tiē zài (le) jiàoshì de qiáng shàng

(lit. Emily paint *de* picture *bei* post-on (*le*) classroom *de* wall-on)

The picture Emily painted was put/posted on the wall.

30.1.4 Describing a static or dynamic phenomenon

Let us start our discussion with a static phenomenon and suggest a set of four related sentences stating that ‘a few old people are sitting in a railway carriage’:

车厢里坐着几个老年人。

chēxiāng lǐ zuò zhe jǐ ge lǎoniánrén

车厢里有几个老年人坐着。

chēxiāng lǐ yǒu jǐ ge lǎoniánrén zuò zhe

有几个老年人坐在车厢里。

yǒu jǐ ge lǎoniánrén zuò zài chēxiāng lǐ

有几个老年人在车厢里坐着。

yǒu jǐ ge lǎoniánrén zài chēxiāng lǐ zuò zhe

The first is the most typical. It describes the phenomenon and is verbally the most balanced. It begins with a location phrase followed by an intransitive verb marked by the aspect marker 着 *zhe*, indicating an ongoing phenomenon. It ends with the initiator or agent of the action expressed in the intransitive verb, but this does not hamper our understanding of the whole utterance. We might compare it with a sentence in English like ‘here comes the bus’.

The second sentence also begins with the location phrase, but the initiator of the action now appears in its intrinsic position before the verb that conveys the action. The only modification is the inclusion of the verb 有 *yǒu* ‘there is/are’ before the initiator-subject to maintain its indefinite reference. (有 *yǒu* is used in the following two sentences as well with the same function.)

The third sentence follows the prototypical SVC sequence, in which the verb is intransitive, similar to the SVO pattern, where the verb is transitive.

The only thing of note here is that the aspect marker 着 *zhe* is superfluous and is covered by the presence of the coverb 在 *zài* ‘(to exist) in, at’.

The fourth sentence differs from the third with the coverbal complement phrase changing into a coverbal adverbial phrase modifying the intransitive verb.

The equal validity of the four variations evinces the versatility of the syntactic repertory to register different emphases and foci.

We will now rephrase the four syntactic patterns above with a non-human subject and a transitive verb. The sentences are variations of a statement that ‘a large heap of old newspapers are piled on the desk’.

书桌上堆³着一大沓旧报纸。

shūzhuō shàng duī zhe yī dà dá jiù bàozhǐ

书桌上有一大沓旧报纸堆着。

shūzhuō shàng yǒu yī dà dá jiù bàozhǐ duī zhe

有一大沓旧报纸堆在书桌上。

yǒu yī dà dá jiù bàozhǐ duī zài shūzhuō shàng

有一大沓旧报纸在书桌上堆着。

yǒu yī dà dá jiù bàozhǐ zài shūzhuō shàng duī zhe

³ The verb used need not be monosyllabic all the time. They may be disyllabic like 堆放 *duīfàng* or 堆叠 *duīdié* ‘to be piled up’ (in this set of examples) or 端坐 *duānzùo* ‘to sit straight’ (as in the first set of examples) so long as they are of juxtapositional or modificational nature, and of course they must not demonstrate location displacement tendencies at all times. (See [Chapter 28](#) Morphology and Syntax (I).)

We find all of them as acceptable as the first set. From a Chinese syntactic point of view, in sentences describing a static phenomenon, the partnership between the verb, whether transitive or intransitive, and its nominal argument, whether human or non-human, is already inherent in their underlying meaning, which is derivable from real life. The SVO sequence is a prototypical representation, which can be rewritten in as many varied patterns as are allowed by the syntax of the language.

However, if we change the verb into a dynamic one (a verb that communicates an action or movement), we find that not all patterns are equally valid or acceptable. Take this set of sentences, which report that ‘a good number of athletes are running/jogging on the sports ground’:

*运动场上跑着好几个运动员。

yùndòngchǎng shàng pǎo zhe hǎo jǐ ge yùndòngyuán

运动场上有好几个运动员在跑步/在跑(着)/在跑着步。

**yùndòngchǎng shàng yǒu hǎo jǐ ge yùndòngyuán zài
pǎobù / zài pǎo (zhe) / zài pǎo zhe bù**

*有好几个运动员跑在运动场上⁴。

yǒu hǎo jǐ ge yùndòngyuán pǎo zài yùndòngchǎng shàng

有好几个运动员在运动场上跑步/跑着/跑着步。

**yǒu hǎo jǐ ge yùndòngyuán zài yùndòngchǎng shàng
pǎobù / pǎo zhe / pǎo zhe bù**

⁴ Some readers may know that in a popular Chinese song in the 1950s there is a sentence which runs: 我们走在大路上 **wǒmen zǒu zài dàlù shàng**. This in fact is only possible because it is a song lyric, a different register, and not ordinary prose.

The first pattern is invalid, because a dynamic or movement-oriented verb does not tolerate a reverse order in the action expressed by the verb and its initiator or agent.

The second is acceptable because it follows the SV order and incorporates the aspect marker 在 **zài** to indicate continuous action with the possible addition of 着 **zhe** at the end of the sentence.

The third is unacceptable as a movement-oriented verb like 跑 **pǎo** 'to run' does not tolerate a complement introduced by a static coverb like 在 **zài** '(to exist) in, at'.

In the fourth sentence, which is valid, 在 **zài** has its dual function of coverb and continuous aspect marker, governing the location phrase 运动场上 **yùndòngchǎng shàng** 'the sports ground' as a coverb and simultaneously functioning as an aspect marker marking the persistence of the action expressed in the verb 跑 **pǎo** 'to run' or 跑步 **pǎobù** 'to jog'.

In semantic terms, the first and third examples in this set allow only verbs that do not express location displacement. Likewise, morphologically, they do not accept disyllabic lexemes of a governmental (i.e. verb + object) construction either: for example, if the old people in the carriage are chatting:

*车厢里聊着天几个老年人。 **chēxiāng lǐ liáo zhe tiān jǐ ge lǎoniánrén**

车厢里有几个老年人在聊(着)天。

chēxiāng lǐ yǒu jǐ ge lǎoniánrén zài liáo (zhe) tiān

*有几个老年人聊天在车厢里。

yǒu jǐ ge lǎoniánrén liáotiān zài chēxiāng lǐ

有几个老年人在车厢里聊(着)天。

yǒu jǐ ge lǎoniánrén zài chēxiāng lǐ liáo (zhe) tiān

The underlying rules that govern the acceptance of the second and fourth examples are thus the same in regard to both semantics and morphology. (See the chapter on Morphology and Syntax (I) and also footnote 3 in this chapter.)

30.2 Choices made through stylistic considerations

To start with let us pose that you are in a social situation and want to find out whether somebody is Mr Zhang or not; you might have the following set of options:

- (1) 您是张先生吗? **nín shì zhāng xiānsheng ma**
Are you Mr Zhang?
- (2) 您是张先生吧? **nín shì zhāng xiānsheng ba**
You are Mr Zhang, I presume?
- (3) 您不是张先生吗? **nín bù shì zhāng xiānsheng ma**
Aren't you Mr Zhang?
- (4) 您不是张先生吧? **nín bù shì zhāng xiānsheng ba**
You aren't Mr Zhang, are you?
- (5) 您是不是张先生? **nín shì bù shì zhāng xiānsheng**
You're Mr Zhang, aren't you?
您是张先生不是? **nín shì zhāng xiānsheng bù shì**
You're Mr Zhang, are you not?

All the questions, semantically speaking, are looking for the same information: is the person you are addressing Mr Zhang. They are, however, stylistically varied depending on the different assumptions you are making, which can be seen from the respective English translations.

The first is the most typical and commonly used style-neutral question with 吗 *ma*.

In the second with 吧 *ba*, you are making the assumption that the person you are addressing is most likely to be Mr Zhang.

The third question, which incorporates the negator 不 *bù* with 吗 *ma*, sounds somewhat rhetorical. You are less inclined to believe the person you are addressing can be someone other than Mr Zhang.

The fourth question, which is the odd one out, is included for completeness sake. You do not believe that the person is Mr Zhang and your tone indicates this.

The fifth question is a positive-negative question, which makes a closed-ended question like 吗 *ma* (which expects the answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’) slightly more open by allowing two possibilities from the start.

The second version of the fifth question is a more open alternative, showing you are more inclined to believe that you are talking to Mr Zhang.

In the following sections, we shall see how this stylistically varied set is used with different types of verbs and different syntactic structures.

30.2.1 Stylistic variations using verbs other than 是 *shì*

a. The verb 有 *yǒu* ‘to have, to possess’

- (1) 你有兄弟姊妹⁵吗? *nǐ yǒu xiōngdì zǐmèi ma*
Do you have any brothers and sisters?
- (2) 你有兄弟姊妹吧? *nǐ yǒu xiōngdì zǐmèi ba*
You have brothers and sisters, don’t you?
- (3) 你没有兄弟姊妹吗? *nǐ méi yǒu xiōngdì zǐmèi ma*
Don’t you have any brothers and sisters?
- (4) 你没有兄弟姊妹吧? *nǐ méi yǒu xiōngdì zǐmèi ba*
You don’t have any brothers and sisters, do you?
- (5) 你有没有兄弟姊妹? *nǐ yǒu méi yǒu xiōngdì zǐmèi*
你有兄弟姊妹没有? *nǐ yǒu xiōngdì zǐmèi méi yǒu*
Do you have any brothers and sisters, or not?

⁵ 兄弟姊妹 *xiōngdì zǐmèi* means the same as 兄弟姐妹 *xiōngdì jiěmèi* ‘brothers and sisters; siblings’

b. A simple intransitive verb

- (1) 你明天来吗? *nǐ míngtiān lái ma*
Are you coming tomorrow?
- (2) 你明天来吧? *nǐ míngtiān lái ba*
You are coming tomorrow, aren’t you?
- (3) 你明天不来吗? *nǐ míngtiān bù lái ma*
Aren’t you coming tomorrow?
- (4) 你明天不来吧? *nǐ míngtiān bù lái ba*
You are not coming tomorrow, are you?
- (5) 你明天来不来? *nǐ míngtiān lái bù lái*
你明天来不? *nǐ míngtiān lái bù*
Are you coming tomorrow or not?

The same set of options is acceptable when the intransitive verb is followed by other verbs, whether transitive or not. For example,

你明天来参加吗?

nǐ míngtiān lái cānjiā ma

Are you coming to take part tomorrow?

你明天来不来参加比赛?

nǐ míngtiān lái bù lái cānjiā bǐsài

你明天来参加比赛不?

nǐ míngtiān lái cānjiā bǐsài bù

Are you coming to take part in the competition tomorrow,
or not?

An intransitive verb used to narrate a past action or event:

(1) 你昨天去了吗? **nǐ zuótiān qù le ma**

Did you go yesterday?

(2) 你昨天去了吧? **nǐ zuótiān qù le ba**

You went yesterday, didn't you?

(3) 你昨天没(有)去吗? **nǐ zuótiān méi (yǒu) qù ma**

Didn't you go yesterday?

(4) 你昨天没(有)去吧? **nǐ zuótiān méi (yǒu) qù ba**

You didn't go yesterday, did you?

(5) 你昨天去没去? **nǐ zuótiān qù méi qù**

你昨天去了没有? **nǐ zuótiān qù le méi yǒu**

你昨天有没有去? **nǐ zuótiān yǒu méi yǒu qù**

Did you go yesterday or not?

Now, an intransitive verb used to describe a past experience:

(1) 你以前去过吗? **nǐ yǐqián qù guo ma**

Have you been before?

(2) 你以前去过吧? **nǐ yǐqián qù guo ba**

You have been before, haven't you?

(3) 你以前没(有)去过吗? **nǐ yǐqián méi qù guo ma**

Haven't you been before?

(4) 你以前没(有)去过吧? **nǐ yǐqián méi qù guo ba**

You haven't been before, have you?

(5) 你以前去没去过? **nǐ yǐqián qù méi qù guo**

你以前去过没有? **nǐ yǐqián qù guo méi yǒu**

你以前有没有去过? **nǐ yǐqián yǒu méi yǒu qù guo**

Have you been before, or not?

c. A simple transitive verb

For economy of space, from now on we shall focus on examples (1) and (5) of each set.

- (1) 这只狗咬人吗? **zhèi zhī gǒu yǎo rén ma** Does this dog bite?
 (5) 这只狗咬不咬人? **zhèi zhī gǒu yǎo bù yǎo rén**
 这只狗咬人不(咬)? **zhèi zhī gǒu yǎo rén bù (yǎo)**

A transitive verb with an auxiliary or modal verb

- (1) 你会下围棋吗? **nǐ huì xià wéiqí ma** Can you play go?
 (5) 你会不会下围棋? **nǐ huì bù huì xià wéiqí**
 你会下围棋不(会)? **nǐ huì xià wéiqí bù (huì)**

Encoding a past action or event:

- (1) 你今年交了税吗? **nǐ jīnnián jiāo le shuì ma**
 Did you pay taxes this year?
 (5) 你今年交了税没有? **nǐ jīnnián jiāo le shuì méiyǒu**
 你今年有没有交税? **nǐ jīnnián yǒu méiyǒu jiāo shuì**

Encoding a past experience:

- (1) 你过去打过青霉素吗?
nǐ guòqù dǎ guo qīngméisù ma
 Have you ever been given penicillin injections?
 (5) 你过去打过青霉素没有?
nǐ guòqù dǎ guo qīngméisù méiyǒu
 你过去有没有打过青霉素?
nǐ guòqù yǒu méiyǒu dǎ guo qīngméisù

d. 把 bǎ and 被 bèi constructions

- (1) 你把大门锁上了吗? **nǐ bǎ dà mén suǒ shàng le ma**
 Did you lock/Have you locked the main gate/door?
 (5) 你把大门锁上了没有?
nǐ bǎ dà mén suǒ shàng le méiyǒu
 你有没有把大门锁上?
nǐ yǒu méiyǒu bǎ dà mén suǒ shàng
 (1) 犯人扣押起来了? **fàn rén bèi kòu yā qǐ lai le ma**
 Has/Have the criminal/criminals been detained?
 (5) 犯人扣押起来了没有?
fàn rén bèi kòu yā qǐ lai le méiyǒu
 犯人有没有被扣押起来?
fàn rén yǒu méiyǒu bèi kòu yā qǐ lai

e. Causative constructions

- (1) 你劝他别旷课了吗? **nǐ quàn tā bié kuàngkè le ma**
Did you tell him not to miss/skip class again?
- (5) 你劝他别旷课了没有? **nǐ quàn tā bié kuàngkè le méiyǒu**
你有没有劝他别旷课? **nǐ yǒu méiyǒu quàn tā bié kuàngkè**

f. A verbal potential complement

- (1) 你下星期来得了吗? **nǐ xià xīngqī láideliǎo ma**
Can you come next week?
- (5) 你下星期来得了来不了? **nǐ xià xīngqī láideliǎo láibuliǎo**
你下星期来不来得了? **nǐ xià xīngqī láibu láide liǎo**

A verbal potential complement with a grammatical object

- (1) 你下星期加得了班吗?
nǐ xià xīngqī jiādeliǎo bān ma
Can you do overtime next week?
- (5) 你下星期加得了班加不了?
nǐ xià xīngqī jiādeliǎo bān jiābuliǎo
你下星期加不加得了班?
nǐ xià xīngqī jiābu jiāde liǎo bān

An adjectival potential complement

- (1) 电脑修得好吗? **diànnǎo xiūdehǎo ma**
Can the computer be repaired?
- (5) 电脑修得好修不好? **diànnǎo xiūdehǎo xiūbuhǎo**
电脑修不修得好? **diànnǎo xiūbu xiūde hǎo**

It should be pointed out that these second versions of example (5) are more likely to be found in southern speech.

30.2.2 *Using the expository generator* 是不是 **shì bù shì** 'is it the case that' as an alternative

All the above patterns from (a) to (f) can be reformulated by the insertion of 是不是 **shì bù shì** or its more formal counterpart, 是否 **shì fǒu**, if what you seek from your respondent is confirmation of a present fact rather than a particular action or event. This changes the question from a narrative to an expository stance. The last two examples from (f) are the only exceptions, as potential complement constructions like these point to

future possibilities and the addition of 是不是 *shì bù shì* or 是否 *shì fǒu* does not alter its existing expository nature.

你是不是有兄弟姊妹?

nǐ shì bù shì yǒu xiōngdìzǐmèi

Do you have brothers and sisters?

你明天是否来参加比赛?

nǐ míngtiān shìfǒu lái cānjiā bǐsài

(Now tell me) are you coming to take part in the competition or not.

这只狗是不是不咬人?

zhèi zhī gǒu shì bù shì bù yǎo rén

(Now) does this dog bite or not?

你是不是会下围棋?

nǐ shì bù shì huì xià wéiqí

Do you play go?

你今年是否交了税了?

nǐ jīnnián shìfǒu jiāo le shuì le

Have you paid tax this year?

你过去是不是打过青霉素?

nǐ guòqù shì bù shì dǎ guo qīngméisù

(Now) have you ever been given penicillin injections?

你是不是把大门锁上了?

nǐ shì bù shì bǎ dà mén suǒ shàng le

Have you locked the main gate/door?

犯人是否被扣押起来了?

fàn rén shìfǒu bèi kòuyā qǐ lai le

Has/have the criminal(s) been detained?

你是否劝他别旷课了?

nǐ shìfǒu quàn tā bié kuàngkè le

Have you told him not to miss/skip class (again)?

你下星期是不是加得了班?

nǐ xià xīngqī shì bù shì jiā deliǎo bān

Are you able to do overtime next week?

电脑是否修得好?

diànnǎo shìfǒu xiū de hǎo

Is it possible to repair the computer?

It can be seen that 是不是 **shì bù shì** or 是否 **shì fǒu** is generally positioned immediately before the predicate verb unless the latter is preceded by a negator, a modal verb or coverbs like 把 **bǎ** or 被 **bèi**, or, as we shall see in the examples given below, by a coverbal phrase or a closely related adverbial.

北京人是不是把马铃薯叫土豆儿？

běijīngrén shì bù shì bǎ mǎlíngshǔ jiào tǔdòur

Do Beijing people call the potato by its colloquial name **tǔdòur** rather than **mǎlíngshǔ**?

你是不是叫他把垃圾倒掉了？

nǐ shì bù shì jiào tā bǎ lājī dào diào le

Have you told/Did you tell him to throw the rubbish/garbage out?

你们是不是还富余几张票？

nǐmen shì bù shì hái fùyú jǐ zhāng piào

Do you have a few tickets left/to spare?

你把他当我了，是不是？

nǐ bǎ tā dāng wǒ le | shì bù shì

Did you think he was me?

是不是 **shì bù shì** or 是否 **shì fǒu** may also be used to express tentative suggestions:

大家是不是按次序报一下儿自己的名字？

dàjiā shì bù shì àn cìxù bào yī xià zìjǐ de míngzì

Could everyone call out their name in turn, please?

咱们是不是用无记名投票的方式/用举手的方式表决一下？

zánmen shì bù shì yòng wú jìmíng tóupiào de fāngshì/yòng jǔshǒu de fāngshì biǎojié yīxià

Should we vote by secret ballot or by raising of hands?

你是不是别和他抬杠了？

nǐ shì bù shì bié hé tā táigàng le

You shouldn't get into argy-bargy again with him!

你是不是先把饭煮好了再炒菜？

nǐ shì bù shì xiān bǎ fàn zhǔ hǎo le zài chǎo cài

Shouldn't you cook the rice first and then do the stir-fry?

你是否报了名再说？

nǐ shì fǒu bào le míng zài shuō

Why don't you sign up first (before you consider anything else)?

30.3 Word order guided by difference in meaning, emphasis or focus

We shall start the discussion of this section with two simple questions:

你爸爸是谁? **nǐ bàba shì shéi**

Who is your father?/What does your father do?/What is his job?

谁是你爸爸? **shéi shì nǐ bàba**

Who is your father?/Which one is your father?

The various translations hint at the distinction between them. The first is generally construed as a question about a person's professional category and the answer is likely to be something like:

我爸爸是大学讲师。

wǒ bàba shì dāxué jiǎngshī

My father is a university lecturer.

我爸爸是一家公司的经理。

wǒ bàba shì yī jiā gōngsī de jīnglǐ

My father is the company manager.

The starting point in the questioner's mind is 你爸爸 **nǐ bàba** 'your father', and the question is expecting a clarification or categorization.

The second question is more contextual. In it, the speaker is asking the listener to point out his or her father in a group or on a photograph and the answer could be something along the lines of:

我爸爸是那个穿黑皮夹克的人。

wǒ bàba shì nèi ge chuān hēi pí jiākè de rén

My father is the man/person wearing/in a black leather jacket.

or

那个穿黑皮夹克的人是我爸爸。

nèi ge chuān hēi pí jiākè de rén shì wǒ bàba

The man/person wearing/in the black leather jacket is my father.

The point of departure this time for the speaker is 谁 **shéi** 'who', and he or she wants the father to be identified amongst a number of people.

谁 **shéi** 'who' at the beginning of a question is therefore often used for identification. For example,

谁是张太太? **shéi shì zhāng tàitai**

Who/Which person (here) is Mrs Zhang?

The answer may be either 我是 **wǒ shì** 'I am' or 是我 **shì wǒ** 'It's me', or 她是 **tā shì** 'She is' or 是她 **shì tā** 'it's her'.

It must be pointed out that care should be taken with a question like 你是谁 **nǐ shì shéi** 'Who are you?', which can sometimes be interpreted to mean 'Who do you think you are?'

30.3.1 *Insight from structures used in an apportioning exercise*

Here, we are dealing with certain formal and functional expressions and their syntax. To illustrate this, we will cite the rules or instructions received when visiting a hotel or attending a conference.

These expository expressions, which are spoken or written, normally follow the SVO pattern, but most of them apparently defy semantic logic in that the object is the agent of the action of the verb on the subject. The literal translations make this clear. They generally begin with the numeral — **yī** 'one'.

一个房间住两个人⁶。

yī ge fángjiān zhù liǎng ge rén

(one mw [**ge**] room stay two mw [**ge**] people)

There are two people to a room.

一辆车坐五十人。 **yī liàng chē zuò wǔshí rén**

(one mw [**liang**] vehicle sit fifty people)

A coach seats fifty people.

一席菜吃十个人。 **yī xí cài chī shí ge rén**

(one [**xi** table] dishes eat ten mw [**ge**] people)

There are ten people to a table.

一瓶酒喝五个人。 **yī píng jiǔ hē wǔ ge rén**

(one mw [**ping** bottle] wine drink five mw [**ge**] people)

There is one bottle of wine for five people.

一个人发一份讲义。 **yī ge rén fā yī fèn jiǎngyì**

(one mw [**ge**] person issue one mw [**fen**] handout)

There is one handout per person.

⁶ The sentence in fact has three variations: a. 一个房间住两个人 **yī ge fángjiān zhù liǎng ge rén**; b. 每一个房间住两个人 **měi yī ge fángjiān zhù liǎng ge rén**; c. 每个房间住两个人 **měi ge fángjiān zhù liǎng ge rén** There should be two people to a room./There are meant to be two people to a room.

一个人派两张票。 **yī ge rén pài liǎng zhāng piào**
(one mw [ge] person assign two mw [zhang] tickets)
There are two tickets per person.

一个人盖两张毯子。 **yī ge rén gài liǎng zhāng tǎnzi**
(lit one mw [ge] person cover two mw [zhang] blankets)
There are two blankets per person.

一个房间配一部电脑。 **yī ge fángjiān pèi yī bù diànnǎo**
(one mw [ge] room allocate one mw [bu] computer)
There is one computer for each room.

每 **měi** ‘every’ has to be used if the sentence begins with a numeral other than 一 **yī** ‘one’, e.g.

每两天看一场电影。 **měi liǎng tiān kàn yī chǎng diànyǐng**
Every two days there is/you can see a film

每三天安排一次游览。 **měi sān tiān ānpái yī cì yóulǎn**
Every three days a (sight-seeing) tour/trip is arranged/provided

每四小时收发一次信件。 **měi sì xiǎoshí shōufā yī cì xìnjiàn**
Mail is received and dispatched every four hours

Chinese syntax, as we have seen, hinges more on its speakers’ tacit understanding of real-life situations or possibilities that make sense than on strictly stereotypical SVO structures, where S must be understood as an initiator or agent and O, a recipient or patient.

30.3.2 A verb and its arguments

Following the previous discussion, we will now look at a selected group of ‘verb + object’ phrases or lexemes and see what further kinds of grammatical (or semantic) relationships can pertain between the verb and its object.

写毛笔 **xiě máobǐ** (instrumental) (lit. write brush) write with a brush

From the English translation you can see that you can only write WITH a Chinese brush, which is obviously a writing instrument. What you actually write will be Chinese words or characters. Actually, 写毛笔 **xiě máobǐ** means the same as 用毛笔写字 **yòng máobǐ xiě zì** ‘to write Chinese characters using a Chinese brush’.

吃馆子 **chī guǎnzi**

(locational) (lit. eat restaurant) to eat out/at a restaurant

The grammatical object of 吃 **chī** ‘to eat’ can only indicate a location.

说笑话 **shuō xiàohuà**

(resultative) (lit. say/speak joke) to tell a joke

The joke comes into existence as a result of your telling it, i.e. you speak and the joke follows.

下大雨 **xià dàyǔ** (nominative) (lit. fall large rain) to rain heavily

Logically, of course, ‘the rain’ should fall.

The idiomatic English translations of some of the Chinese lexemes below do not necessarily convey their full meaning. In some cases, the literal translations offer more detailed insights.

睡觉 **shuìjiào** (resultative) (lit. sleep (a) sleep) to sleep

You can also say 睡了一大觉 **shuì le yī dà jiào** ‘to have had a sound sleep’.

做梦 **zuòmèng** (resultative) (lit. make dream) to dream

This can be elaborated with 做了一个噩梦/恶梦 **zuò le yī ge è mèng** ‘to have had a nightmare’.

坐车 **zuòchē**

(instrumental or locational) (lit. sit vehicle) to take the bus

The bus here is a vehicle or instrument that you ‘take’ and the place where you are is where you are sitting.

走神儿 **zǒushénr**

(nominative) (lit. go/walk mind) to be absent-minded

When your mind wanders, the implication is that your spirit has left you and gone somewhere else.

度假 **dùjià**

(temporal) (lit. pass/spend holiday) to spend (your) holidays

烤火 **kǎohuǒ**

(locational or nominative) (lit. warm fire) to warm yourself by the fire

The fireplace is the location, but the fire initiates the warming process.

追债 **zhuīzhài**

(purpose-oriented) (lit. pursue debt) to pursue a debt

The grammatical object here indicates the purpose of chasing someone.

逃难 **táonàn**

(cause-determined) (lit. flee/escape difficulty) to escape from a disaster

The grammatical object here registers the cause or reason for flight.

In fact, it is difficult if not impossible to exhaust all the conceivable semantic relationships between verbs and their objects, particularly when the relationship is derived from the real world they represent. The examples we have given are for illustration, but we can see from them that the grammatical relationship between a Chinese verb and its nominal (or pronominal, or even the verbal or adjectival as in the last two examples) arguments can be multifarious: nominative (or subjective), accusative (or objective), resultative, instrumental, or locational, to name only a few⁷. However, speech is a linear process, and there are only two positions available adjacent to a verb: before it or after it, to lodge the arguments. This, in many cases, does not present a problem in Chinese syntax because either of the positions is able to take arguments that assume different grammatical roles without affecting the overall meaning of the entire structure, apart from perhaps slight alterations in emphases or foci.

⁷ Some languages (e.g. Russian) under similar circumstances may have their nominal arguments assume different case forms like instrumental, prepositional, dative, etc.

This brings us to sentences like the following, where the order of the verb and its agent is reversed, yet the grammatical (or semantic) relationship they contract with each other remains unchanged:

她从小母亲就死了。

tā cóngxiǎo mǔqīn jiù sǐ le

(lit. she from small mother then die **le**)

When she was a child her mother died.

她从小就死了母亲。

tā cóngxiǎo jiù sǐ le mǔqīn

(lit. she from child then die **le** mother)

When she was a child she lost her mother.

The first sentence answers the question: what happened to her mum when she was little (i.e. her mother died), whereas the second answers the question: what happened to her when she was little (i.e. she lost her mother).

Likewise, we shall find in the sentences below that all the verbs are intransitive (like 死 **sǐ** 'to die'), and even when their syntactic 'agent' S is moved

behind the V to become a pseudosyntactic ‘patient’ O, the argument’s nominative relationship with the verb remains unaltered:

病后他一只眼睛瞎了。 **bìng hòu tā yī zhī yǎnjīng xiā le**
(lit. illness after he one mw [zhī] eye blind le)
After his illness one of his eyes went blind.

病后他瞎了一只眼睛。 **bìng hòu tā xiā le yī zhī yǎnjīng**
(lit. illness after he blind le one mw [zhī] eye)
After his illness he lost the sight in one of his eyes.

孩子的烧已经退了。 **háizi de shāo yǐjīng tuì le**
(lit. child de fever already go down le)
The child’s fever has already gone down.

孩子已经退了烧(了)。 **háizi yǐjīng tuì le shāo (le)**
(lit. child already go down le fever le)
The child has already had his/her fever go down.

外面风刮得很大。 **wàimiàn fēng guā de hěn dà**
(lit. outside wind blow de very big)
Outside the wind is blowing very hard.

外面刮着很大的风。 **wàimiàn guā zhe hěn dà de fēng**
(lit. outside blow zhe very big de wind)
Outside there is a very strong wind blowing.

太阳出来啦！ **tàiyáng chūlái la**
(lit. sun come out la) The sun has come out!

出太阳啰！ **chū tàiyáng luo**
(lit. come out sun luo) Out comes the sun!

Or even sentences like the following:

这壶水浇这些花。 **zhèi hú shuǐ jiāo zhèi xiē huā**
(lit. this can water water these flowers)
This can of water is for watering these flowers.

这些花浇这壶水。 **zhèi xiē huā jiāo zhèi hú shuǐ**
(lit. these flowers water this can water)
These flowers are to be watered with this can of water.

In the first sentence, 这些花 **zhèi xiē huā** ‘these flowers’ is the syntactic O, which is the ‘patient’ (i.e. in the accusative case); whereas in the second, 这壶水 **zhèi hú shuǐ** ‘this can of water’ becomes the pseudosyntactic O, which is actually the ‘instrument’ (i.e. in the instrumental case).

这些作料配这个菜。 **zhèi xiē zuòliào pèi zhèi ge cài**
(lit. these spices match this mw [ge] dish) These spices go with this dish.

这个菜配这些作料。 **zhèi ge cài pèi zhèi xiē zuòliào**
(lit. this ge dish match these spices) This dish goes with these spices.

In the first sentence of the set, 这个菜 **zhèi ge cài** ‘this dish’ is the syntactic O, which is the ‘patient’ (i.e. in the accusative case); whereas in the second, 这些作料 **zhèi xiē zuòliào** ‘these spices’ becomes the pseudosyntactic O, which is actually the ‘instrument’ (i.e. in the instrumental case).

林肯的生平可以查百科全书。
línkěn de shēngpíng kěyǐ chá bǎikēquánshū
(lit. Lincoln **de** life can look up encyclopaedia)
Lincoln’s biography can be found in the encyclopaedia.

百科全书可以查林肯的生平。
bǎikēquánshū kěyǐ chá línkěn de shēngpíng
(lit. encyclopaedia can look up Lincoln **de** life)
In the encyclopaedia can be found Lincoln’s biography.

In the first sentence, 百科全书 **bǎikēquánshū** ‘the encyclopaedia’ is the ‘locational’ or ‘instrumental’ O, where or whereby 林肯的生平 **línkěn de shēngpíng** ‘Lincoln’s biography’ can be found; whereas in the second, 林肯的生平 **línkěn de shēngpíng** ‘Lincoln’s biography’ is the true syntactic O (i.e. in the accusative case).

30.3.3 Dimensional measurements

In specific semantic areas, there are sometimes different ways to express the same idea. In dimensional measurements, for example, questions always contain the verb 有 **yǒu** and the adverb 多 **duō**⁸: e.g.

这件行李有多重? **zhèi jiàn xíngli yǒu duō zhòng**
How heavy is this case/this piece of luggage?

这段河水有多深? **zhèi duàn héshuǐ yǒu duō shēn**
How deep is this stretch of the river?

这条隧道有多长? **zhèi tiáo suìdào yǒu duō cháng**
How long is this tunnel?

⁸ The verb 有 **yǒu** may sometimes be omitted, whereas the adverb 多 **duō** must always be present.

这堵墙有多厚?

zhèi dǔ qiáng yǒu duō hòu

How thick is this wall?

这条街有多宽?

zhèi tiáo jiē yǒu duō kuān

How wide is this road?

这座楼有多高?

zhèi zuò lóu yǒu duō gāo

How high is this building?

The answers can be couched in two ways: with the specific dimension indicators either preceding or following the numbers or measurements or sometimes comparable ideas: e.g.

这件行李(有)二十公斤重。

zhèi jiàn xíngli (yǒu) èrshí gōngjīn zhòng

or

这件行李重二十公斤。

zhèi jiàn xíngli zhòng èrshí gōngjīn

This case/piece of luggage is twenty kilograms.

这段河水(有)一米深。

zhèi duàn héshuǐ yǒu yī mǐ shēn

This stretch of river is a metre deep.

or

这段河水齐腰深。

zhèi duàn héshuǐ qí yāo shēn

The water in this stretch of the river comes up to the waist/waist height.

Sometimes, to emphasize a particularly high measurement, the verb 达 **dá** ‘to reach’ is placed after the dimension indicator:

这条隧道长达五公里。

zhèi tiáo suìdào cháng dá wǔ gōnglǐ

This tunnel is as long as five kilometres.

这座楼房高达五十米。

zhèi zuò lóufáng gāo dá wǔshí mǐ

This building is as high as fifty metres.

When more than one measurement has to be given, a similar sentence pattern is normally used:

这张床两米长，一点四米宽，五十厘米高。

zhèi zhāng chuáng liǎng mǐ cháng | yī diǎn sì mǐ kuān | wǔshí línmǐ gāo

This bed is two metres long, one point four metres wide, and fifty centimetres high.

这张桌子长一公尺，宽五十公分，高七十五公分。

zhèi zhāng zhuōzi cháng yī gōngchǐ | kuān wǔshí gōngfēn | gāo qīshí wǔ gōngfēn

This table is one metre long, fifty centimetres wide, and seventy-five centimetres high.

30.3.4 是 shì used to pinpoint time, place, purpose, reason, etc.

The verb 是 shì 'to be' has been discussed in detail in [Chapter 15](#). In this section, we shall focus on the role that 是 shì may play to pinpoint time, place, purpose, reason, etc. from an intralingual transposition point of view.

a. Time

Below is a sentence where the time 'in 1995' has been highlighted:

我是在1995年最后一次见到她(的)。

wǒ shì zài yījiǔjiǔwǔ nián zuìhòu yī cì jiàndào tā (de)

'It was in 1995 when I last met/saw him.'

As an alternative, 是 shì could be used to move the time expression to the end of the construction thereby adding end weight to the expression:

我最后一次见到她是在1995年。

wǒ zuìhòu yī cì jiàndào tā shì zài yījiǔjiǔwǔ nián

'The last time I met/saw him was in 1995.'

The optional 的 *de* in the first sentence is of course left out in the transposition. Its presence in the first sentence is to signal a past action, and its omission in the second makes the sentence expository.

b. Place

我是在伦敦第一次遇见她(的)。

wǒ shì zài lúndūn dìyī cì yùjiàn tā (de)

'It was in London that I first came across her.'

A similar transposition can occur here:

我第一次遇见她是在伦敦。

wǒ dìyī cì yùjiàn tā shì zài lúndūn

'The first time I came across her was in London.'

c. Purpose

我是为了了解中国这个国家才学中文的。

**wǒ shì wèile liǎojiě zhōngguó zhèi ge guójiā cái xué
zhōngwén de**

'To understand (this country) China was the reason why I learnt Chinese.'

In this case the transposition requires the dropping of the referential adverb 才 *cái* 'only because' and 的 *de*:

我学中文是为了了解中国这个国家。

**wǒ xué zhōngwén shì wèile liǎojiě zhōngguó zhèi ge
guójiā**

'I learnt Chinese in order to understand (this country) China.'

d. Reason

我是因为有病才请假的。

wǒ shì yīnwèi yǒu bìng cái qǐngjià de

'It was because I was ill that I asked for leave.'

There is a similar transposition here:

我请假是因为有病。

wǒ qǐngjià shì yīnwèi yǒu bìng

'I asked for leave because I was ill.'

e. Instrument

Where an instrument is involved, 的 *de* is more often than not retained in the transposition:

我是用电脑写文章的。

wǒ shì yòng diànnǎo xiě wénzhāng de

'I use a computer to write articles.'

Two alternative transpositions, meaning 'To write articles I use a computer' are possible:

我写文章是用的电脑。

wǒ xiě wénzhāng shì yòng de diànnǎo

or

我写文章用的是电脑。

wǒ xiě wénzhāng yòng de shì diànnǎo

The reason that 的 *de* is kept here is perhaps that every time one writes one has to have one's instrument ready beforehand.

30.3.5 *The blurred juncture between negation and affirmation*

There are instances in life when something almost happens but in the event doesn't. These borderline events or non-events are reflected in language in the possible use of parallel negative or affirmative expressions to encode a narrative or argument. For example,

我好不容易才把问题调查清楚。

wǒ hǎo bù róngyì cái bǎ wèntí diàochá qīngchu

我好不容易才把问题调查清楚。

wǒ hǎo róngyì cái bǎ wèntí diàochá qīngchu

In these two sentences 好不容易 **hǎo bù róngyì** and 好不容易 **hǎo róngyì** both mean 'with great difficulty', the former being more straightforward and the latter perhaps carrying a slightly sarcastic tone. The sentences therefore have the same meaning: 'I had a hard time investigating the problem (clearly).'

Similarly,

我差点儿把事情办砸了。

wǒ chàdiǎnr bǎ shìqíng bàn zá le

我差点儿没把事情办砸(了)。

wǒ chàdiǎnr méi bǎ shìqíng bàn zá (le)

which both mean 'I almost botched the thing.'

The fact of course was that in practice 'the thing wasn't botched' (事情没办砸 **shìqíng méi bàn zá**), though obviously it could have gone either way, and 差点儿 **chàdiǎnr** 'almost' expresses the risk, i.e. 'by the skin of one's teeth'. 险些 **xiǎnxiē** 'narrowly' can be used in the same way.

The same apparent contradiction occurs in the following two sentences:

不管他怎么说，我决定这样干下去。

bùguǎn tā zěnmē shuō | wǒ juéding zhèyàng gàn xiàqu

管他怎么说，我决定这样干下去。

guǎn tā zěnmē shuō | wǒ juéding zhèyàng gàn xiàqu

which both mean ‘No matter what he says I have decided to go ahead with this.’

The speaker’s mind is evidently already made up. The first version is again straightforward, while the second, without the negative 不 *bù*, has a somewhat derisive sense and the speaker is not going to listen, no matter what is said.

30.3.6 Noun becoming adjective or verb: a word class shift

While adjectives and verbs can be easily nominalized to become S or O in syntactic or lexemic constructions, it is not often that nouns can become adjectives or verbs. However, when this does happen, the outcome can be striking:

这个作品真太艺术了。

zhèi ge zuòpǐn zhēn tài yìshù le (艺术 *yìshù* ‘art’)

‘This piece of work is truly artistic.’

这样的分析很不科学。

zhèyàng de fēnxī hěn bù kēxué (科学 *kēxué* ‘science’)

‘This kind of analysis is very unscientific.’

你头发剪短些就精神了。

nǐ tóufa jiǎn duǎn xiē jiù jīngshén le (精神 *jīngshén* ‘spirit’)

‘You’ll look more spirited/sprightly if you have your hair cut a bit shorter.’

别恶作剧了。

bié èzuòjù le (恶作剧 *èzuòjù* ‘prank, practical joke’)

‘Don’t be mischievous.’

30.4 Synonymy that affects word order, formality, collocation, mode of expression, individual speech habit, etc.

There are, of course, other semantic areas where comparable words or synonyms used may similarly affect the word order of resultant constructions,

the style or formality of the rendition, the collocation requirements, different modes of expression, or even personal speech habits: e.g.

a. Word order

这儿数他年龄最小。 **zhèr shǔ tā niánlíng zuì xiǎo**
(lit. here count him age most small)

这儿他算年龄最小。 **zhèr tā suàn niánlíng zuì xiǎo**
(lit. here he consider age most small)
'He is the youngest person here.'

b. Formality

我家只有我一个人带眼镜。
wǒ jiā zhǐyǒu wǒ yīgerén dài yǎnjìng (neutral)
'In my family I am the only one who wears glasses.'

我家就我一个人带眼镜。
wǒ jiā jiù wǒ yīgerén dài yǎnjìng (colloquial)
'In my home there is only me who wears glasses.'

我喝了一口酒/茶。
wǒ hē le yī kǒu jiǔ/chá (neutral)
'I drank a mouthful of wine/tea.'

我咂了一口酒/茶。
wǒ zā le yī kǒu jiǔ/chá (colloquial)
'I sipped a mouthful of wine/tea.'

我呷了一口酒/茶。
wǒ xiā le yī kǒu jiǔ/chá (slangy)
'I sipped a mouthful of wine/tea.'

c. Collocation requirement

For example, putting on different pieces of clothing:

穿衣服/裤子/袜子/鞋子
chuān yīfu/kùzi/wàzi/xiézi
'to put on clothes/trousers/socks or stockings/shoes or slippers'

戴帽子/手套/戒指/耳环
dài màozi/shǒutào/jièzhī/ěrhuan
'to put on a hat/ gloves/a ring/earrings'

打领带/领结 **dǎ lǐngdài/lǐngjié**
'to put on a tie/bowtie'

系皮带/鞋带/围裙/扣子

jì pí dài/xié dài/wéi qún/kòu zi

'to fasten a (leather) belt/shoelaces/apron/buttons'

d. Different modes of expression

旅馆里人都住满了。

lǚ guǎn lǐ rén dōu zhù mǎn le (expository)

'The hotel is fully occupied by people.'

旅馆里住满了人。

lǚ guǎn lǐ zhù mǎn le rén (descriptive)

'The hotel is full.'

e. Individual speech habits

When reminding somebody to take something with him/her, different speakers may employ various forms of expression, which generally all mean the same thing, 'Please take your things with you':

请你把东西带好。 **qǐng nǐ bǎ dōngxi dài hǎo**

请你把东西带上。 **qǐng nǐ bǎ dōngxi dài shàng**

请你把东西带着。 **qǐng nǐ bǎ dōngxi dài zhe**

请你把东西带走。 **qǐng nǐ bǎ dōngxi dài zǒu**

请你把东西带在身上。 **qǐng nǐ bǎ dōngxi dài zài shēn shàng**

Likewise, 'Please sit down':

请坐。 **qǐng zuò**

坐，坐，坐。 **zuò | zuò | zuò**

坐坐，坐坐。 **zuò zuò | zuò zuò**

Interlingual conversions

Interlingual conversions are not to be understood as translations. In interlingual conversions, as we shall see, we are dealing with basic, rule-governed linguistic operations that pertain when converting a text from one language into another in an acceptable form; translations, on the other hand, involve an extended process of artistic creation and re-creation until the translated text has been honed into an appropriate and acceptable representation of the original.

In the specific context here, by interlingual conversions, we mean of course the verbal or lingual conversion from English into Chinese or vice versa, and the fundamental rules that govern such operations.

To illustrate our point, we will start with an extreme example from Chinese poetry, so that the distinction we make between interlingual conversion and translation may be highlighted.

‘On geese’ (咏鹅 *yǒng é*) is by the seventh-century Tang Dynasty poet Luo Binwang (骆宾王). Here is the text, followed immediately by a literal translation:

鹅，鹅，鹅 *é é é* geese, geese, geese
曲项向天歌。 *qū xiàng xiàng tiān gē* sinuous neck towards sky sing
白毛浮绿水， *bái máo fú lǜ shuǐ* white feather float green water
红掌拨清波。 *hóng zhǎng bō qīng bō* red foot move clear wave

A minimal, but acceptable, interlingual conversion following more or less the original’s grammatical pattern and word order would be:

Geese, geese, geese:
Their serpentine necks sing to the skies;
Their white feathers float on green waters,
And their red feet push clear ripples.

Another possible conversion using further syntactic constructions peculiar to English might be:

Geese, geese, geese -

They sing with their serpentine necks stretched towards the skies,
Their white feathers floating on green waters,
And their red feet pushing clear ripples.

Whether we adhere more or less to the original format of three sequences of predicate-verb constructions similar to the Chinese (though we still need to introduce prepositions, articles and determiners), as we do in the first conversion, or whether, as in conversion two, we adopt a more sophisticated English form deploying structures peculiar to the language like absolute constructions, prepositional or past participial phrases, we have to introduce language-specific features of English, such as determiners, conjunctives, connectives, etc.

Despite the fact that both Chinese and English are SVO languages, the organizational principles and presentational details intrinsic to their surface structures are in fact very different. We will illustrate these contrasts in the sections that follow.

However, before we leave the poem, we offer a much more elaborate translation:

Geese,
geese,
geese -
You stretch your long, sinuous necks
as if you were singing proudly to the skies.
Like poised bundles of white feathers
bobbing and floating on greeny waters,
You paddle your red webbed-feet
to propel yourselves
through transparent
ripples.

Here, while trying to voice the poet's sentiments about the geese, we have introduced stylistic footprints of our own, e.g. the four-beat sprung rhythm, the use of the rhetorical figure: apostrophe, the employment of imageries associated customarily with geese (proudly, poised, etc), the echoing alliteration of the alternation of 'bundles of feathers' and 'bobbing and floating', the consonance between 'bundle' and 'paddle', the consistent euphony produced by the recurring sound of -p- in proudly, poised, paddle, propel,

transparent, and ripples; and -s- or -z- in geese, sinuous, stretch, sing, poised, themselves, bundles, feathers, waters, necks, skies, ripples, and so on, and finally, the shape in print of a goose swimming¹.

What our translation illustrates is the fact that the stylistic choices of an individual translator can produce an outcome that is very different from a linguistic conversion.

We will now review the distinctive syntactic peculiarities of English and Chinese and consider how they might be reconciled. In our discussion we will follow convention and use the word translation indiscriminately, irrespective of the distinction we have just made, and we will start with the overall organizing principle intrinsic to Chinese and English.

¹ In our 'shaping' of the translation, we are indebted to John Hollander and his concrete poem on a swan and its reflection in the water, see 'Reading Poetry – an Introduction' by Tom Furniss & Michael Bath (1966), Cornwall: Prentice Hall.

31.1 Context-dependent economy vs strict structural completeness

It is often observed that pidgin English can be an accurate reflection of the word order of spoken Chinese. Take the following well-known example:

Long time no see².

好久不见了。hǎo jiǔ bù jiàn le (lit. very long-time not see **le**)

² This pidgin English expression was, of course, originally a translation from Chinese and has itself become an English idiom.

On the other hand, if we start with a more standard expression in English, the Chinese translation can be somewhat clumsy and verbose:

It's been a long time since we last met.

自从我们上次见面以后，已经有很长时间了

zìcóng wǒmen shàng cì jiànmiàn yǐhòu | yǐjīng yǒu hěn cháng shíjiān le

(lit. since we last time meet after(wards), already there-is very long time **le**)

These two examples demonstrate the different grammatical priorities of English and Chinese, with the former requiring a more complete, inflected form, and the latter being more economic, context-dependent in its expression. If a translation from English seeks the surface or superficial

grammatical completeness of the original, it can undermine the conventional economy of Chinese.

This does not mean, of course, that grammatical completeness is always a fault in Chinese–English translation, but it is perhaps best employed when misunderstanding might arise.

31.1.1 Context- or cotext-dependent omission of subjects and objects

By context, we mean the actual environment or situation in which the speech takes place, and by cotext, we mean the written text of which the speech or writing forms a part.

Here are a couple of examples:

Suppose you are in a shop and a salesperson approaches you. He tries to press the sale of something on you (e.g. a new gadget), offering a discount, but you are not interested and say:

再便宜也不买。zài piányi yě bù mǎi

(lit. even-more cheap still not buy) I won't have it even if it's cheaper

The translation shows the English need for grammatical completeness. On the other hand, in the original Chinese, the two grammatical subjects 'it' (the gadget) and 'I' (you, the customer) are both left out and so is the grammatical object 'it' (again the gadget). It is clear that Chinese syntax relies heavily on the actual situation or context.

It would sound foreign (and unacceptable) if, for instance, you said something like:

†它再便宜我也不买它³。tā zài piányi wǒ yě bù mǎi tā

lit. it even-more cheap I still not buy it

³ 它 tā 'it', when it represents an inanimate thing, almost never occurs in the object position in Chinese. If the object has to be mentioned, it will need to be specifically identified, e.g. 'I read about it in the paper'. 我在报纸上看到这条消息。wǒ zài bàozhǐ shàng kàndào zhèi tiáo xiāoxi (lit. I in newspaper saw this mw news), and never *我在报纸上看到它。wǒ zài bàozhǐ shàng kàndào tā.

Let's take another example, this time from air travel. When a plane is landing, passengers are invariably warned not to release their safety belts until the plane has come to a complete stop. As the message is addressed to all the passengers, the addressees need not be mentioned:

请等飞机停稳再松开安全带。

qǐng děng fēijī tíng wěn zài sōngkāi ānquándài

(lit. please wait aircraft stop stable only-then loosen open safety belt)

Please do not release your safety belt until the plane has come to a complete standstill.

Similarly, a coach driver might advise his passengers:

请等车停稳再下。**qǐng děng chē tíng wěn zài xià**

(lit. please wait bus stop stable only-then get-off)

Please don't get off until the bus has come to a halt.

If he said 请大家等车停稳了再下车 **qǐng dàjiā děng chē tíng wěn le zài xià chē** (lit. please everyone wait bus stop stable *le* only-then get-off), this would sound equally acceptable, but would be certainly less succinct.

Consider also this short exchange between a reader and a librarian:

Librarian: 归还⁴还是续借? **guīhuán háishì xùjiè**

(lit. return or extend-loan)

Are you returning it/the book or do you want to renew it?

Reader: 我想续借。**wǒ xiǎng xùjiè**

(lit. I want extend-loan)

I want to renew it.

Librarian: 可以。不过至多只能续借五次。

kěyǐ | bùguò zhìduō zhǐ néng xùjiè wǔ cì

(OK. but at (the) most only able extend-loan five times)

OK, but you can only renew it for a maximum of five times.

⁴ The character 还 occurs firstly here as **huán** 'to return (something that one has borrowed)', which may be used alone or as part of the disyllabic word 归还 **guīhuán** 'to return (a book, etc); and secondly as **hái** as part of the disyllabic conjunction 还是 **háishì** 'or' used to formulate alternative questions.

It is immediately apparent that, compared with the English, neither the book nor the borrower is mentioned in the Chinese. Both are understood to be present from the context.

Let's look finally at an exchange between two friends:

A: 明晚来不来参加派对? **míngwǎn lái bù lái cānjiā pàiduì**

(lit. tomorrow evening come not come attend party)

Are you coming to the party tomorrow evening?

B: 看来是来不了了。**kànlái shì láibuliǎo le**

(lit. look is come not able *le*)

It looks as if I won't be able to come.

A: 有别的约会不是? **yǒu biéde yuēhuì bù shì**

(lit. have another appointment not is)

Do/is it that you have something else on?

B: 不是。是文章没写完。 **bù shì | shì wénzhāng méi xiě wán**

(lit. not is, is essay not write finish)

No, it is because I haven't finished writing my essay (yet).

No grammatical subjects are needed here, because the context in Chinese makes the situation perfectly clear.

Let us now turn to the cotextual dimension with this example of cotextual omission:

弟弟买了一支新铅笔，放在抽屉里，可是第二天就不见了。弟弟冤枉妹妹，说怎么可以没问过他就擅自拿去用呢。

didi mǎi le yī zhī xīn qiānbǐ | fàng zài chōuti li | kěshì dì èr

tiān jiù bù jiàn le | didi yuānwang mèimei | shuō zěnmē

kěyǐ méi wèn guo tā jiù shànzi ná qu yòng ne

(lit. younger brother buy **le** one mw new pencil, place in drawer

inside, but second day then not see **le**. younger brother wrong

younger sister say how able not having-asked him then arrogate

to self take go use **ne**)

Younger brother bought a new pencil, and put it in the drawer, but the next day it wasn't there. Younger brother unfairly blamed his younger sister, saying how could she take it and use it without asking him.

The 'pencil' is mentioned only once and does not occur again either as a subject or as an object. 'Younger sister' likewise appears only once, even though she is the subject in the following clause.

The sentence becomes verbose if all the grammatical subjects and objects, whether in their nominal or pronominal form, are included, even if Chinese syntactic constructions like 把 **bǎ** are used:

弟弟买了一支新铅笔，(把它)放在抽屉里，可是第二天(它)就不见了。

弟弟冤枉妹妹，说(她)怎么可以没问过他就擅自(把它)拿去用呢。

didi mǎi le yī zhī xīn qiānbǐ | (bǎ tā) fàng zài chōuti li | kěshì

dì èr tiān (tā) jiù bù jiàn le | didi yuānwang mèimei | shuō

(tā) zěnmē kěyǐ méi wèn guo tā jiù shànzi (bǎ tā) ná qu

yòng ne

(lit. younger brother buy **le** one mw new pencil, (cv:grasp it) place in

drawer inside, but second day (it) then not see **le**. younger brother

wrong younger sister, say (she) how able not having asked him then

arrogate to self (cv:grasp it) take go use **ne**.)

It would certainly be incorrect if the subjects and objects were all retained in the word-order sequence of English:

*弟弟买了一支新铅笔，放(它)在抽屉里，可是第二天(它)就不见了。弟弟冤枉妹妹，说(她)怎么可以没问过他就擅自拿(它)去用(它)呢。

dìdì mǎi le yī zhī xīn qiānbǐ | fàng (tā) zài chōuti li | kěshì dì èr tiān (tā) jiù bù jiàn le | dìdì yuānwang mèimei | shuō (tā) zěnmē kěyǐ méi wèn guo tā jiù shànzì ná (tā) qu yòng (tā) ne
(lit. younger brother buy **le** one mw new pencil, place (it) in drawer inside, but second day (it) then not see **le**. younger brother wrong younger sister, say (she) how able not having asked him then arrogate to self take (it) go use (it) **ne**)

Here is another cotextual example. You write to a friend and ask him to remember you to his parents when he writes home:

信中替我带一笔，问你父母好。

xìn zhōng tì wǒ dài yī bǐ | wèn nǐ fùmǔ hǎo
(lit. letter-in for me include a message, enquire your parents well)
Remember me to your parents in your letter.

It would sound far too precise and wordy, if he were to say something like:

你在写给你父母的信中替我带一笔，说我问他们好。

nǐ zài xiě gěi nǐ fùmǔ de xìn zhōng tì wǒ dài yī bǐ | shuō wǒ wèn tāmen hǎo
(lit. you in write to parents **de** letter for me include a message say I enquire them well)

As can be seen from the above, the contextual and cotextual tendencies in the Chinese language inevitably lead to a more condensed form of expression and invite the omission of subjects and objects, wherever possible.

31.1.2 Possessive indicators not indicating actual possession are superfluous in Chinese

Possessive indicators like 你的 **nǐ de** 'your', 我的 **wǒ de** 'my', etc are used only to indicate material possession or close relationship. For example,

我(的)家 **wǒ (de) jiā** 'my home'
我妈妈 **wǒ māma** 'my mum'
你的钥匙 **nǐ de yàoshi** 'your keys'
他的想法 **tā de xiǎngfǎ** 'his ideas'
她的钱 **tā de qián** 'her money'

Unlike English, Chinese possessive indicators are not used for parts of the body or for matters of immediate concern. For example,

Shaking your head for 'No' is not universal.

摇头并不是在所有的文化里都表示不同意。

yáotóu bìng bù shì zài suǒyǒu de wénhuà lǐ dōu biǎoshì bù tóngyì

(lit. shake head certainly not cv:**zài** all cultures-in all indicate not agree)

*摇你的头并不是在所有的文化里都表示不同意。

yáo nǐ de tóu bù shì zài suǒyǒu de wénhuà lǐ dōu biǎoshì bù tóngyì

(lit. shake your head certainly not cv:**zài** all cultures-in all indicate not agree)

She broke her leg skating.

她溜冰时摔断了一条腿。

tā liūbīng shí shuāi duàn le yī tiáo tuǐ

(lit. she slide ice time fall break **le** one mw leg)

†她溜冰时摔断了她的一条腿。

tā liūbīng shí shuāi duàn le tā de yī tiáo tuǐ

(lit. she slide ice time fall break **le** her one mw leg)

He lost his temper.

他发脾气了。**tā fā píqi le**

(lit. he lose temper **le**)

*他发他的脾气了。**tā fā tā de píqi le**

(lit. he lose his temper **le**)

I lost my balance.

我失去了平衡。

wǒ shī qu le pínghéng

(lit. I lose **le** balance)

*我失去了我的平衡。

wǒ shī qu le wǒ de pínghéng

(lit. I lose **le** my balance)

We've lost our way.

我们迷路了。**wǒmen mílù le**

(lit. we lose road **le**)

*我们迷了我们的路了。

wǒmen mí le wǒmen de lù le

(lit. we lose **le** our road **le**)

I came on my bike.

我是骑自行车来的。wǒ shì qí zìxíngchē lái de
(lit. I am cv:ride bike come **de**)

我是骑自己的自行车来的⁵。wǒ shì qí zìjǐ de zìxíngchē lái de
(lit. I am cv:ride own bike come **de**)

†我是骑我的自行车来的。wǒ shì qí wǒ de zìxíngchē lái de
(lit. I am cv:ride my bike come **de**)

If you don't use your Chinese, you'll soon forget it.

中文学了不用，很快就会忘记的。

zhōngwén xué le bù yòng | hěn kuài jiù huì wàngjì de
(lit. Chinese study **le** not use, very soon then will forget **de**)

你学了中文不用，很快就会忘记的。

nǐ xué le zhōngwén bù yòng | hěn kuài jiù huì wàngjì de
(lit. you study **le** Chinese not use, very soon then will forget **de**)

†你的中文学了不用，很快就会忘记的。

nǐ de zhōngwén xué le bù yòng | hěn kuài jiù huì wàngjì de
(lit. your Chinese study **le** not use, very soon then will forget **de**)

⁵ This version is used only when you want to emphasize the fact that you came on your own bike and not someone else's.

31.1.3 *No syntactic device is necessary to link a non-(pro)nominal subject or object to the predicate verb*

For a non-(pro)nominal grammatical subject, English uses a gerund, or an infinitive, or a that-clause, or even an it-substitute, with each of them assuming a salient grammatical form. Chinese, on the other hand, simply places a verb or verbal phrase or a subject-predicate structure in the subject position and then follows it with another verb (or other verbs) to complete the predication. These linguistic structures do not require any of the formal syntactic devices used in English, such as a gerund, infinitive or clause. In Chinese, sequence articulated within context and common sense, knowledge and experience on the part of the speaker or writer are the main determining factors. There is no need for the grammatical inflections or syntactic repertory/accoutrements of English.

In fact, similar syntactic features (i.e. no outward inflections or signs) are observed between a predicate verb and its object or between a predicate verb and its related verbal expressions indicating purpose, cause, condition, and so on.

The English translations, particularly the literal translations, of the following Chinese sentences will illustrate these points.

每天快步行走能帮助人保持身体健康。

měitiān kuàibù xíngzǒu néng bāngzhù rén bǎochī shēntǐ jiànkāng

(lit. every day fast pace walk can help one maintain body health)

Walking every day at a brisk pace helps one to get fit.

Going for a brisk walk every day helps one get fit.

The verb phrase ‘every day at a brisk pace walk’ in Chinese replaces the gerundial subject in English.

吃西红柿补得了前列腺吗？

chī xīhóngshì bǔdeliǎo qiánlièxiàn ma

(lit. eat tomatoes able to benefit prostate gland **ma**)

Is eating tomatoes good for the prostate gland?

The verb phrase ‘eat tomatoes’ again takes the place of the English gerund.

你这样对待他有点儿说不过去吧。

nǐ zhèyàng duìdài tā yǒudiǎnr shuōbuguòqu ba

(lit. you like this treat him somewhat cannot justify **ba**)

The way you treated him can’t very well be justified.

Your treating him like this can’t really be justified.

The ‘subject + predicate’ construction ‘you like this treat him’ here replaces the English subject, which can include an attributive clause or take the form of a gerund.

天天自己做饭太费时间了。**tiāntiān zìjǐ zuòfàn tài fèi shíjiān le**

(lit. every day oneself cook (food) very waste time **le**)

Doing all the cooking yourself every day is a great waste of time.

Being your own cook every day really wastes a lot of time.

It is really time-consuming to do all the cooking every day on your own.

Once again a ‘subject + predicate’ construction in Chinese replaces an English gerund or infinitive.

大家都喜欢她办事认真。**dàjiā dōu xǐhuan tā bànshì rènzhēn**

(lit. everyone all like her do things conscientious)

Everybody likes the conscientious way she deals with everything.

Everybody likes the fact that she does everything conscientiously.

In this Chinese sentence, an SVO clause is the direct object of the verb ‘to like’. In the English translations, a nominal object has to be found to attach an attributive clause to, in the first case ‘the . . . way’ and in the second

‘the fact’. These translations can themselves be back-translated into forms of Chinese translationese:

大家都喜欢她那种办事认真的态度。

dàjiā dōu xǐhuan tā nèi zhǒng bànshì rènzhēn de tàidu

大家都喜欢她办事认真这一事实。

dàjiā dōu xǐhuan tā bànshì rènzhēn zhēi yī shìshí.

谁敢打赌他一口气吃不下十八片面包？

(lit. who dare bet he one breath not able eat down eighteen slice bread)

shéi gǎn dǎdǔ tā yīkǒuqì chībuxià shíbā piàn miànbāo

Who dares to bet that he won't be able to eat eighteen slices of bread in one go?

Here, the whole object clause is placed after the verb with no linkage markers.

你不排队就抢先上车难道不感到羞耻吗？

(lit. you not queue then vying first board bus do you mean to say that not feel shame)

nǐ bù páiduì jiù qiǎng xiān shàngchē nándào bù gǎndào xiūchǐ ma

Don't you feel ashamed (of yourself) when you push to get on the bus first without queuing?

The topic in this sentence lists two actions you have taken: ‘not queueing’ and ‘vying/pushing to get on the bus first’, and the comment that follows simply says ‘don't you feel ashamed’. 对此 **duìcǐ** ‘with regard to this’ could possibly be inserted to provide a more complete statement 不排队就抢着上车，你对此难道不感到羞耻吗？ **bù páiduì jiù qiǎng zhe shàngchē | nǐ duìcǐ nándào bù gǎndào xiūchǐ ma**. However, the utterance would then sound extremely pedantic.

四百米接力赛我跑最后一棒。

sì bǎi mǐ jiēlìsài wǒ pǎo zuìhòu yī bàng

(lit. four hundred metres relay I run the last baton)

I shall run the last leg in the four hundred metres relay.

In this case, the nominal phrase ‘the four hundred metres relay’ appears as a topic rather than the fuller adverbial postpositional phrase 在四百米接力赛中 **zài . . . zhōng**, which is governed by the coverb 在 **zài** ‘in, at’

你上饭馆吃完饭付账给小费吗？

nǐ shàng fànguǎn chīwán fàn fùzhàng gěi xiǎofèi ma

(you go restaurant finish eating pay bill give tip **ma**)

Do you give a tip when you pay your bill after a meal in a restaurant?

Here, the Chinese sentence is simply a string of verb constructions in a temporal and logical sequence: you go to a restaurant, you finish your meal, you pay your bill, and you give tips. The time noun (的) 时候 *de shíhou* ‘the time (when) . . .’ has been left unsaid. A fuller version, including this time noun, might be: 你上饭馆吃完饭付账的时候给小费吗? *nǐ shàng fànguǎn chī wán fàn fùzhàng de shíhou gěi xiǎofèi ma?* It is also interesting to note that the two Chinese verbs ‘go to restaurant’ and ‘finish eating meal’ have become prepositions in English.⁶

⁶ The conversion of Chinese verbs into English prepositions will be fully discussed in section 31.3.

31.1.4 *Habitual omission of conjunctions and connectives*

In English, there is always a linking connector of some kind between two clauses. In Chinese, on the other hand, such linking devices exist only in formal writing. In colloquial speech or informal writing, such linking devices are rarely present.

Strangely enough, despite such drastic language economy, these hidden linkages can always be retrieved without fail. This can be seen from, and proved by, the English translations.

Here are some examples to demonstrate our point:

地方小邀请不了那么多人。

dìfang xiǎo yāoqǐngbuliǎo nàme duō rén

(lit. place small unable invite so many people)

The place is so small I can’t possibly invite so/that many people.

There’s no way that I can invite so/that many people as the place is so small.

Adding the related connectives 因为 *yīnwèi* ‘because’ and 所以 *suǒyǐ* ‘therefore’ can, of course, create a fuller version: 因为地方小, 所以邀请不了那么多人。 *yīnwèi dìfang xiǎo | suǒyǐ yāoqǐngbuliǎo nàme duō rén.* However, a native speaker would be most unlikely to use a sentence like that.

这孩子骑自行车喜欢双手撒把。

zhè háizi qí zìxíngchē xǐhuan shuāng shǒu sā bǎ

(lit. this child cv:ride bike likes both hands let go handlebars)

The child likes riding his bike letting go of the handlebars (with both hands).

The child likes riding his bike without holding the handlebars.

The child likes letting go of the handlebars with both hands when he rides his bike.

Adding 的时候 *de shíhòu* ‘the time when ...’ to the first verb phrase to make a time adverbial would be an alternative and fuller version: 这孩子骑自行车的时候喜欢双手撒把。 *zhèi háizi qí zìxíngchē de shíhòu xǐhuan shuāng shǒu sā bǎ.*

赶到那儿已经是十点钟了。

gǎn dào nàr yǐjīng shì shí diǎn zhōng le

(lit. hurry to there already is ten o'clock *le*)

It was already ten by the time I got there.

I got there as quickly as I could but it was already ten when I arrived.

Again there is no need for a time link, i.e. 的时候 *de shíhòu* ‘the time when ...’:

赶到那儿的时候，已经是十点钟了。

gǎn dào nàr de shíhòu | yǐjīng shì shí diǎn zhōng le.

别在光线不足的地方看书弄坏眼睛。

bié zài guāngxiàn bù zú de dìfang kàn shū nòngguài yǎnjīng

(lit. don't in light not enough *de* place read-book damage eyes)

Don't read in a poor light or you'll damage your eyes.

You'll ruin your eyes if you read in a poor light.

Don't read (in a place) where the light is poor, otherwise you will damage your eyes.

The connective 不然 *bùrán* ‘otherwise’ might be added to make the sentence more explicit: 别在光线不足的地方看书，不然会弄坏眼睛的。 *bié zài guāngxiàn bù zú de dìfang kàn shū | bùrán huì nòngguài yǎnjīng de.*

你扶着梯子，我上去。

nǐ fú zhe tīzi | wǒ shàng qu

(lit. you hold ladder I go up)

If you hold the ladder, I'll climb up/go up.

I'll go up the ladder if you hold it for me.

You hold the ladder and I'll go up.

A native speaker would be rather pretentious if he or she said something like this: 如果你能扶着梯子的话，我就能上去了。 *rúguǒ nǐ néng fú zhe tīzi de huà | wǒ jiù néng shàng qu le.*

这里没有穿衣镜，试不了衣服。

zhèlǐ méiyǒu chuānyījīng | shìbulǎo yīfu

(lit. here there is not full-length mirror, cannot try on clothes)

There's no full-length mirror here, so you can't try things on.

As there's no full-length mirror here, I can't try this on.

The connective 因此 *yīncǐ* ‘because of this’ could be added to link the two parts of the sentence, but again it would sound too formal: 这里没有穿衣镜, 因此试不了衣服。 *zhèlǐ méiyǒu chuānyījìng | yīncǐ shìbuliǎo yīfu.*

这件行李太沉, 他不一定搬得动。

zhèi jiàn xíngli tài chén | tā bù yīdìng bāndédòng

(lit. this piece luggage too heavy, he not necessarily able to move)

This piece of luggage is perhaps too heavy for him to lift.

This case is so heavy he may not be able to move/carry it.

Again 因此 *yīncǐ* ‘because of this’ could be inserted to make a fuller version: 这件行李太沉, 因此他不一定搬得动。 *zhèi jiàn xíngli tài chén | yīncǐ tā bù yīdìng bāndédòng.*

你瘦了准是想家想的。

nǐ shòu le zhǔn shì xiǎngjiā xiǎng de

(lit. you thin *le* certainly is think-home think *de*)

You must be missing your family so much that you have lost weight.

You look thinner and must be missing your family/home very much.

There are two ways to rephrase this utterance: (1) 你准是想家想瘦了 *nǐ zhǔn shì xiǎngjiā xiǎng shòu le* (lit. you certainly is think-home think thin *le*), or (2) 你准是想家想得人都瘦了。 *nǐ zhǔn shì xiǎngjiā xiǎng de rén dōu shòu* (lit. you certainly is think-home think *de* person even thin *le*). Both of them are grammatical and accurate Chinese, but the original is more colloquial and idiomatic.

尝尝这个菜好吃不好吃。

chángchang zhèi ge cài hǎochī bù hǎochī

(lit. taste a taste this mw dish good-to-eat not good-to-eat)

Try this dish and see if it tastes nice.

One way of establishing the link between the two consecutive verb constructions is to use the conjunctive 就 *jiù*, e.g. 尝尝这个菜, 你就知道(它)好吃不好吃了。 *chángchang zhèi ge cài | nǐ jiù zhīdao (tā) hǎochī bù hǎochī le.*

你怎么说我也不相信。 *nǐ zěnmē shuō wǒ yě bù xiāngxìn*

(lit. you how say I still not believe)

No matter how you put it I still won't believe it.

I just won't believe it no matter what you say.

I won't be convinced whatever you say.

Obviously, the link in this sentence is established by the conjunctive 也 *yě* ‘still, despite what has been said’. A fuller version would be: 不管你怎么说, 我也不相信。 *bùguǎn nǐ zěnmē shuō | wǒ yě bù xiāngxìn.*

All these examples show that conjunctions or connectives are more often than not omitted in Chinese speech, and to include them will tend to make what is said unnatural and uncolloquial.

31.2 A time-sequenced string of verb-centred constructions vs an organized combination of verbs, participles, gerunds, infinitives, prepositions, etc.

The discussion of connectors brings us to another domain of linguistic linkage. Language does not rely on conjunctions or connectives alone to establish the many-sided relationship between the different elements in a sentence. English, for example, uses participles to encode ‘simultaneity’, infinitives to express ‘purposefulness’, and prepositions to reach out to a whole range of relationships and contexts.

With all these formally differentiated syntactic devices at its disposal, English sentences are therefore well-organized amalgamations of participial, gerundial, prepositional, infinitival, clausal and absolute constructional elements that centre on a predicate verb. And being formally differentiated, these syntactic devices have acquired maximal flexibility to position themselves either before or after the central predicate verb to attain optimal balance, emphasis, or focus.

Without these formally differentiated syntactic devices, Chinese sentences, on the other hand, consist of temporally or logically sequenced strings of marked or unmarked verbs. As a consequence, participial phrases (past or present) in English become verbal phrases in Chinese, as do gerundial, infinitival or even prepositional phrases. A clause in English with its subject–predicate or topic–comment construction of course converts into a similar structure in Chinese, and the same happens with an English absolute construction. In short, virtually all the syntactic structures of the English sentence are rendered in Chinese simply as verbs, verbal phrases, or subject and predicate verb constructions. Nonetheless, despite these contrasting approaches, both languages are able to express equally complex and sophisticated ideas.

First, we will look at two English sentences and their Chinese translations:

- (1) ‘The bedroom was in a real mess, clothes dropped on the floor, empty boxes piled in the corner and uneaten food left on the bedside table.’

房间里真是乱七八糟：衣服扔了一地，墙角里堆满了空箱子，
床头柜上剩着没吃完的食物。

**fángjiān li zhēn shì luànqībāzāo | yīfu rēng le yī dì |
qiángjiǎo li duīmǎn le kōng xiāngzi | chuángtóuguì
shàng shèng zhe méi chīwán de shíwù**

(lit. room-inside really is in a mess: clothes throw **le** all over floor,
corner-in pile full **le** empty boxes, bedside cupboard-on remain
zhe not eaten **de** food)

All the three absolute constructions, after the opening clause, which are framed by past participles in the original, have been converted into self-contained and independent ‘subject + predicate verb’ constructions in Chinese. Only the conjunction ‘and’ in the last part of the sentence is left untranslated.

- (2) ‘He drove along the winding lane very carefully, his eyes fixed on the road and his hands tightly gripping the steering wheel.’

他沿着弯弯曲曲的路，小心翼翼地往前开，两眼盯住前面的路，双手紧握着方向盘。

**tā yán zhe wānwānqūqū de lù | xiǎoxīnyìyì de wǎng qián
kāi | liǎngyǎn dīngzhù qiánmian de lù | shuāngshǒu
jǐnwò zhe fāngxiàngpán**

(lit. he follow **zhe** winding **de** road, with great care **de** ahead
drive, two eyes stare-fix in-front **de** road, both hands tight-grasp
zhe steering wheel)

As with the first example, the two absolute constructions at the end of the sentence in the original, one framed by a past participle and the other by a present participle, have both been rendered as ‘subject + predicate verb’ constructions in Chinese. Again, ‘and’ between the two absolute constructions has been left untranslated.

These two English sentences, as can be seen from the Chinese translations, more or less follow Chinese word order, and the absolute constructions are converted comfortably into Chinese verb constructions. However, as we shall see below, most sentences in English need to be deconstructed and reassembled as Chinese translations.

In each of the following three examples we will present two equally valid conversions: the first (a) correct, but literal, and the second (b) colloquial and an expression of native speech. A comparison of the two together with our back translations and related explanations will illustrate the linguistic contrasts we are describing.

- (1) ‘That highly polished table with carved legs in the middle of the shop window is the one that I like and the one that I want to buy.’

- (a) 那张打磨得锃光瓦亮，桌腿上雕刻着图样，陈列在商店橱窗中央的桌子，是我喜欢的并且想买的。

**nèi zhāng dǎmó de zèngguāngwǎliàng | zhuōtuǐ shàng
diāokè zhe túyàng | chénliè zài shāngdiàn chúchuāng
zhōngyāng de zhuōzi | shì wǒ xǐhuan de bìngqiě xiǎng
mǎi de**

(lit. that mw polish **de** shining bright, table-leg-on carve **zhe** design, display in shop window middle **de** table, is I like **de** and want buy **de**)

- (b) 有张桌子，打磨得锃光瓦亮，桌腿上雕刻着图样，现在正陈列在商店橱窗中央，我很喜欢，很想买。

**yǒu zhāng zhuōzi | dǎmó de zèngguāngwǎliàng | zhuōtuǐ
shàng diāokè zhe túyàng | xiànzài zhèng chénliè zài
shāngdiàn chúchuāng zhōngyāng | wǒ hěn xǐhuan |
hěn xiǎng mǎi**

(lit. there is mw table, polish **de** shining bright, table-leg-on carve **zhe** design, now just display in shop window middle, I very much like, very much want buy)

A fuller back translation of (b) might be:

There is a table, it is polished till it is extremely shiny, the table legs are carved with designs, it is now being displayed in the middle of a shop window, I like it very much, I want very much to buy it.

From this, we can see that the original long attributive of the English has now become three consecutive verb constructions, and the two pronouns with verbal attributives that come towards the end of the sentence have also been converted into two consecutive yet independent verb constructions.

- (2) ‘Queueing endlessly on the motorway in mile-long tailbacks is the most frustrating thing I find about driving these days.’

- (a) 在高速公路上几里长的车龙里没完没了地排队等候，是近年来开车外出最使我感到沮丧的事情。

**zài gāosù gōnglù shàng jǐ lǐ cháng de chēlóng lǐ
méiwánméiliǎo de páiduì dǐnghòu | shì jìnnián lái
kāichē wàichū zuì shǐ wǒ gǎndào jǔsàng de shìqing**

(lit. cv:**zài** high-speed highway-on several li long **de** tailback-in endless **de** queue wait is recent years-in drive car go out most cause me feel disheartened **de** thing)

- (b) 近年来开车外出，往往遇上堵车，高速公路上一下子出现几哩长的车龙，你得没完没了地在那儿排队等候，真令人沮丧/扫兴。

jìnnián lái kāichē wàichū | wǎngwǎng yùshàng dǔchē |
gāosù gōnglù shàng yīxiàzi chūxiàn jǐ lǐ cháng de
chēlóng | nǐ děi méiwánméiliǎo de zài nàr páiduì
děnghòu | zhēn lìng rén jǔsàng / sāoxìng

(lit. recent years-in drive car go out, frequently meet stopped cars, high-speed highway-on all of a sudden appear several li long tailback, you must endless **de** there queue wait, really make one disheartened/disappointed)

Again a fuller back translation might be:

These days when you go out in your car, you are often caught in traffic jams; all of a sudden there is a long tailback on the motorway, and you have to wait endlessly in a queue; it is really frustrating.

A lengthy topic in the form of a gerund in the original has been converted into a sequence of four short verbal constructions and the Chinese sentence ends with a simple predicative ‘most frustrating’, rather than a nominal phrase with an attributive, i.e. ‘a most frustrating thing’.

- (3) ‘Needless to say, using the internet with its ever-growing range of information will help you to find out virtually anything that you need to know.’

- (a) 毋庸赘言，利用网上与日俱增的信息，几乎能帮助你找到任何你想要的东西。

wúyōngzhuìyán | lìyòng wǎngshàng yǔrìjùzēng de xìnxī |
jīhū néng bāngzhù nǐ zhǎodào rènhé nǐ xiǎng yào
zhīdao de dōngxi

(lit. needless to say, use internet-on increase day by day **de** information, almost able help you find any you want know **de** things)

- (b) 不用说，网上的信息越来越多，你想知道什么，几乎都能在网上找到。

bùyòngshuō | wǎngshàng de xìnxī yuè lái yuè duō | nǐ
xiǎng zhīdao shénme | jīhū dōu néng zài wǎngshàng
zhǎodào

(lit. no need say, internet-on **de** information grows more and more, you want know something, almost all able on internet find)

Or more naturally:

Needless to say, there is more and more information available on the internet, and anything you would like to know, you can find on the net almost without fail.

Once again a gerundial topic with a long predicate comment has been reformulated into three verbal expressions arranged in a logical sequence: there is increasingly more information on the net, whatever you want to know, you can find it there.

As a final example, let us consider how the verb-orientated predilection of Chinese deals with an English sentence like the following:

'Battered by the wind and soaked to the skin, we sheltered in a dilapidated barn half way down the hill.'

半路上(or 走到半路)遇到狂风暴雨的袭击, 浑身湿透, 我们躲进半山腰一间破烂不堪的谷仓避雨。

bànlù shàng (or **zǒudào bànlù**) **yùdào kuángfēng bàoyǔ de xíjī** | **húnshēn shītòu** | **wǒmen duǒjìn bàنشānyāo yī jiān pòlàn bùkān de gǔcāng biyǔ** (lit. midway-on (or walk to midway) run into violent storm **de** sudden attack, whole body wet through, we hide-enter half-way-up-mountain one mw dilapidated **de** barn avoid rain)

It can be seen that to narrate an incident like this, a Chinese speaker might begin with a postpositional phrase 半路上 **bànlù shàng** 'midway' or even a verb phrase 走到半路 **zǒudào bànlù** 'lit. walked to midway', and then continue with something like 遇到狂风暴雨的袭击 **yùdào kuángfēng bàoyǔ de xíjī** 'lit. run into a violent storm'. As a result, 浑身湿透 **húnshēn shītòu** '(we were) soaked to the skin', and so 躲进半山腰一间破烂不堪的谷仓 **duǒjìn bàنشānyāo yī jiān pòlàn bùkān de gǔcāng** 'lit. went into hiding (i.e. found shelter) in a dilapidated barn half way down the hill', in order to 避雨 **biyǔ** 'lit. to avoid the rain'.

Instead of one predicate verb 'sheltered' and two past participles 'battered' and 'soaked' in the English, the Chinese is likely to produce four or five verbal and adjectival predicates arranged in a temporal sequence: 走到 **zǒudào** (walk to), 遇到 **yùdào** (meet), 湿透 **shītòu** (wet through), 躲进 **duǒjìn** (hide-enter), and 避雨 **biyǔ** (avoid rain).

A more literal translation might use a verb and coverbal phrase: 在半山腰一间破烂不堪的谷仓里避雨 **zài bàنشānyāo yī jiān pòlàn bùkān de gǔcāng lǐ biyǔ** instead of the native speaker's two consecutive verb version: 躲进 **duǒjìn** and 避雨 **biyǔ**.

We have perhaps had enough examples converting from English into Chinese. Now let's see what happens the other way round.

Here is a sentence in Chinese:

公园的这一角叫‘相亲角’，每逢星期六便挤满了青年男女的父母，都是来替孩子们相亲的。他们出示儿女的照片，询问对方孩子的月薪是多少，有没有自己的住房等等。谈妥了，第二天星期天他们的子女就可以亲自到公园里来相亲了。

**gōngyuán de zhèi yī jiǎo jiào xiāngqīn jiǎo | měi féng xīngqī
liù biàn jǐmǎn le qīngnián nǎnnǚ de fùmǔ | dōu shì lái tì
háizimen xiāngqīn de | tāmen chūshì èrnǚ de zhàopiān |
xúnwèn duìfāng háizi de yuèxīn shì duōshǎo | yǒu méi
yǒu zìjǐ de zhùfáng děngděng | tántuǒ le | dì èr tiān
xīngqī tiān tāmen de zǐnǚ jiù kěyǐ qīnzì dào gōngyuán lǐ
lái xiāngqīn le**

(lit. park **de** this one corner is called 'meet marriage partner corner', every Saturday then crowd-full **le** young males females **de** parents, all are come for children find prospective marriage partners. They show children's photographs, enquire opposite party children's monthly salary how much, have not have their own accommodation etc, etc. discuss-settle **le**, next day Sunday their children then can themselves to park-in come meet prospective partner **le**)

An English version would be as follows:

This corner of the park is called the 'match-making corner'.

Every Saturday it is crowded with parents of young people, who have come to find prospective marriage partners for their children. Showing photographs of their children, they ask the other parents how much per month their children earn, if they have accommodation of their own, etc, etc. If an agreement is reached, the next day, Sunday, their children can come to the park themselves to meet their prospective partners.

We hope that you will be able to navigate your way here through the syntactic differences yourselves.

31.3 Chinese verbs vs English prepositions

There are no prepositions as such in Chinese, and English prepositions are rendered into Chinese in a number of ways.

(1) As verbs:

I am speaking for everyone in the audience.

我代表每一个听众⁷发言。

wǒ dàibiǎo měi yī ge tīngzhòng fāyán

(lit. I represent everyone audience speak)

(for > 代表 **dàibiǎo** ‘to represent’)

He was all in black.

他全身穿着黑色的衣服。

tā quánshēn chuān zhe hēisè de yīfu

(lit. he whole-body wear-**zhe** black **de** clothes)

(in > 穿着 **chuān zhe** ‘wearing’)

They came for our advice.

他们来征求我们的意见。

tāmen lái zhēngqiú wǒmen de yìjiàn

(lit. they come seek our opinion)

(for > 征求 **zhēngqiú** ‘to ask for’)

You are not bad for a beginner.

作为初学者，你算不错的了。

zuòwéi chūxuézhě | nǐ suàn bùcuò de le

(lit. be beginner, you count as not bad **le**)

(for > 作为 **zuòwéi** ‘to be’)

The programme’s on Channel Four.

节目在第四频道播放/播出。

jiémù zài dì sì píndào bōfàng/bō chū

(lit. programme on fourth channel broadcast)

(on > 播放 **bōfàng** or 播出 **bō chū** ‘to broadcast’) Please also

note that 在第四频道 **zài dì sì píndào** is a coverbal phrase that cannot occur on its own. One cannot simply say *节目在第四频道 **jiémù zài dì sì píndào**.

He’s in bed with flu.

他患流感而卧床。 **tā huàn liúgǎn ér wòchuáng**

(lit. he suffer from flu and lie bed)

(in > 卧 **wò** ‘to lie (in bed)’, with > 患 **huàn** ‘to suffer from’)

She walked away from him.

她离他而去。 **tā lí tā ér qù** (lit. she cv:leave him and go)

(from > 离 **lí** ‘to leave’)

⁷ 听众 **tīngzhòng** may be used either as a collective noun meaning ‘the audience’ or as a common noun meaning ‘an individual listener in the audience’.

It's a letter from my younger brother.

这是我弟弟写来的/寄来的信。

zhè shì wǒ dìdì xiě lai de/jì lai de xìn

(lit. this is my younger brother write-come **de**/send-come **de** letter)

(from > 写来 **xiě lai** or 寄来 **jì lai** 'to be sent from')

The mother sang her baby to sleep.

母亲唱歌唱到孩子睡着为止。

mǔqīn chànggē chàng dào háizi shuì zháo wéi zhǐ

(lit. mother sing song sing until child go to sleep)

(to > 到 ... 为止 **dào ... wéi zhǐ** 'to go on until')

The Chinese ambassador to France

中国驻法国大使

zhōngguó zhù fǎguó dàshǐ

(lit. China station France ambassador)

(to > 驻 **zhù** 'to be stationed or posted somewhere')

Information from witnesses

证人提供的信息

zhèngrén tígōng de xìnxi

(lit. witness provide **de** information)

(from > 提供 **tígōng** 'to provide')

A book on psychology

一本论心理学的书 **yī běn lùn xīnlǐxué de shū**

(lit. a mw discuss psychology **de** book)

(on > 论 **lùn** 'to discuss')

In business

做生意 **zuò shēngyì** (lit. do business)

(in > 做 **zuò** 'to do')

A woman with a suitcase

一个提着皮箱的妇人

yī ge tí zhe píxiāng de fùrén

(lit. a mw carry-zhe suitcase **de** woman)

(with > 提着 **tí zhe** 'to carry')

A bus for Oxford

开往牛津的一辆公车

kāi wǎng niújīn de yī liàng gōngchē

(lit. head for Oxford **de** a mw bus)

(for > 开往 **kāi wǎng** 'to head for')

- (2) As postpositional expressions, when the English preposition governs time or location⁸ (see 8.1):

in the evening 晚上 **wǎnshang** (lit. evening-on)
(in > 上 **shang**)

on the wall 墙上 **qiáng shàng** (lit. wall-on)
(on > 上 **shàng**)

in the air 空中 **kōng zhōng** (lit. air-in)
(in > 中 **zhōng**)

in the drawer 抽屉里 **chōuti lǐ** (lit. drawer-in)
(in > 里 **lǐ**)

between the two 两者之间⁹ **liǎngzhě zhī jiān**
(lit. two-**zhe** **zhī** between)
(between > 间 **jiān**)

under the tree 树下 **shù xià** (lit. tree-beneath)
(under > 下 **xià**)

under the seat 座位下边/下面 **zuòwèi xiàbian/xiàmiàn**
(under > 下边 **xiàbian** or 下面 **xiàmiàn**)
(lit. seat-beneath)

above the fireplace 在¹⁰火炉上方 **zài huǒlú shàngfāng**
(lit. at fireplace-above)
(above > 上方 **shàngfāng**)

in front of the window 窗前 **chuāng qián**
(lit. bed-before)
(in front of > 前 **qián**)

behind your back 在你背后 **zài nǐ bèihòu**
(lit. at your back-behind)
(behind > 后 **hòu**)

⁸ Chinese postpositions as we have indicated elsewhere in the book are of a nominal nature, e.g. 上 **shàng** = 上面 **shàngmiàn** or 上边 **shàngbian**, 中 **zhōng** = 中间 **zhōngjiān**, etc.

⁹ 之 **zhī** is the classical equivalent of 的 **de** in contemporary Chinese. 之间 **zhī jiān** therefore means the same as 的中间 **de zhōngjiān**. It's used here to give a better rhythm.

¹⁰ 在 **zài** 'to exist' may sometimes be incorporated into a time or location expression as a coverb, particularly when the said expression is qualified or lengthy, e.g. 在一九五零年冬天一个寒冷的夜晚 **zài yī jiǔ wǔ líng nián dōngtiān yī ge hánlěng de yèwǎn** 'on a cold night in the winter of 1950'.

(3) As coverbs (see [Chapter 11](#)):

Bought for you

替你/为你/给你买的 **tì nǐ/wèi nǐ/gěi nǐ mǎi de**

(for > 替 **tì**, 为 **wèi**, or 给 **gěi** all meaning 'for (the benefit of)')

Write in ink

用墨水写 **yòng mòshuǐ xiě** (lit. use ink write)

(in > 用 **yòng** 'with, using')

Cut with a knife

用刀切/割 **yòng dāo qiē/gē** (lit. use knife cut)

(with > 用 **yòng** 'with, using')

Come from Britain

从英国来 **cóng yīngguó lái** (lit. from Britain come)

(from > 从 **cóng** 'colloquial from')

来自英国 **lái zì yīngguó** (lit. come from Britain)

(from > 自 **zì** 'classical from')

Along the road

沿路 **yán lù** (static) (lit. along road)

(along > 沿 **yán** 'along, alongside')

沿着路 **yán zhe lù** (dynamic) (along **zhe** road)

(along > 沿着 **yán zhe** 'along, moving parallel to')

Go to China

到中国去 **dào zhōngguó qù** (to > 到 **dào** 'to, arriving at')

As can be seen, the correspondence between Chinese coverbs and English prepositions is not always one to one. One Chinese coverb might translate more than one English preposition and, similarly, one English preposition might cover the meaning of more than one Chinese coverb.

Preposition-like adverbs in English are converted in a similar way into Chinese verbs or coverbs:

He's not in.

他不在家。 **tā bù zài jiā** (lit. he not at home)

(in > 在家 **zài jiā** 'to be at home')

This is not on.

这样不行。 **zhèyàng bù xíng** (lit. like this not all right)

(not on > 不行 **bù xíng** 'won't do')

She's up.

她起来了。 **tā qǐlai le** (lit. she get up **le**)

(up > 起来 **qǐlai** 'to get up')

The price has come down.

降价了/减价了。 **jiàngjià le/jiǎnjià le**

(lit. fall price **le**/reduce price **le**)

(down > 降 **jiàng** ‘to fall, drop’ or 减 **jiǎn** ‘to reduce, decrease’)

I’m off.

我走了。 **wǒ zǒu le** (lit. I leave **le**)

(off > 走 **zǒu** ‘to leave, go’)

Let me past/out.

让我过去/出去。 **ràng wǒ guò qu/chū qu**

(lit. let me pass go/exit go)

(past > 过去 **guò qu** ‘to go past’; out > 出去 **chū qu** ‘to go out’)

It’s all over.

一切都完了/一切都过去了。 **yīqiè dōu wán le/yīqiè dōu guòqu le**

(lit. everything all finished **le**/pass by **le**)

(all over > 完 **wán** ‘to be finished’ or 过去 **guòqu** ‘to be past/gone by’)

31.4 Chinese bamboos vs English trees

Looking at the examples in the last few sections, it is possible to suggest that Chinese sentences are like bamboos that grow section after section with a verb as a node at each joint of the bamboo, whereas English sentences are more like trees, with a predicate-verb as the central trunk, which branches into present or past participial phrases, absolute constructions, infinitives, and prepositional phrases, and so on.

Pursuing this simile, when English is translated into Chinese, the English ‘tree’ has to be reshaped as Chinese ‘bamboo’. This means changing all the English participles, infinitives and prepositional phrases into Chinese verbal expressions and arranging them in a temporal or logical sequence. Full stops are used sparingly in Chinese, and thematically related verbal expressions are generally linked by commas. The Chinese sentence, unlike English, does not focus on one central predicate verb, and it may well contain as many nodal verbs as are necessary, whether separated by commas or not.

Let us look finally at one more example of an ‘English tree’ and its conversion into a ‘Chinese bamboo’. The English sentence has a central SVO structure supported by three absolute constructions and an attributive clause:

'The newly elected prime minister addressed his supporters in the square, his face wreathed in smiles, his voice filled with confidence and his words conveying the new conviction that his victory in the election had given him.'

新当选的首相在广场上，向他的支持者致辞。他笑容满面，声音里充满了自信，他说的话传递出这次选举获胜所给予他的那种新的信念。

xīn dāngxuǎn de shǒuxiàng zài guǎngchǎng shàng | xiàng tāde zhīchízhě zhìcí | tā xiàoróng mǎnmian | shēngyīn lǐ chōngmǎn le zìxìn | tā shuō de huà chuándì chū zhèi cì xuǎnjǔ huòshèng suǒ jǐyǔ tā de nèi zhǒng xīn de xīnniàn

(lit. newly get elected **de** prime minister cv:in square-on, to his supporters make speech. He smiling expression filling face, voice-in fill **le** self-belief, he spoke **de** words transmit out this occasion election win victory give to him **de** that kind new **de** conviction.)

The Chinese translation has converted the three absolute constructions of the English into three separate verb constructions. However, the Chinese still sounds somewhat forced, as the last verb construction contains a long attributive. The far more natural translation below renders the English into two sentences, containing a sequence of seven verbal expressions, which stretch out like a bamboo stem. The more or less literal back-translation that follows breaks down the structure of this Chinese version.

新当选的首相来到广场，向他的支持者发表演说。他满怀信心，面带笑容，从他的话语中可以听出，这次选举获胜，给了他新的信念。

xīn dāngxuǎn de shǒuxiàng lái dào guǎngchǎng | xiàng tāde zhīchízhě fābiǎo yǎnshuō | tā mǎnhuái xīnxīn | miàn dài xiàoróng | cóng tā de huà yǔ zhōng kěyǐ tīng chū | zhèi cì xuǎnjǔ huòshèng | gěi le tā xīn de xīnniàn

(lit. newly get elected **de** prime minister come to square, to his supporters makes speech. He is filled with self-belief, face carries smiling expression, cv:from his words-in can hear, this occasion election victory, give **le** him new **de** conviction)

1. The newly-elected prime minister came to the square, [instead of the more static 'in the square']
2. (He) delivered a speech to his supporters.

3. He was filled with confidence,
4. (His) face was wreathed in smiles,
5. From what he said (one) could tell,
6. (the fact that he) had won this election, [the noun ‘victory’ has been converted into the verb ‘to win’]
7. had given him new conviction.

31.5 The inbuilt logic of the Chinese bamboo

We have seen in earlier sections of this book the importance of word order in Chinese sentences, which first set the context for an action before the verb and then spell out the aftermath of that action after the verb. The logical sequence of the Chinese ‘bamboo’ will therefore put expressions relating to time and place of action (with time normally coming before place), supposition, inference, reason, etc. in a pre-verbal position, and results, frequency and duration, etc. in a post-verbal position. An English sentence on the other hand, while normally placing expressions of result, etc. like Chinese after the verb, is infinitely more flexible in its positioning of context expressions. The translations below will illustrate this point.

- (1) ‘Please wait for me here at 3 o’clock this afternoon.’

下午三点钟请在这儿等我。

xiàwǔ sān diǎn zhōng qǐng zài zhèr děng wǒ

(lit. afternoon 3 o’clock please cv:at here wait for me)

Here, the Chinese translation switches the location and time expressions from behind the verb to in front of the verb, with time coming before place in the Chinese. The English could also have been expressed as ‘Please wait here for me this afternoon at 3 o’clock’, but the Chinese translation would have been the same. As we saw in 7.1, the larger time element always comes before the smaller, and so 下午 xiàwǔ ‘afternoon’ has to precede 三点 sān diǎn ‘3 o’clock’.

- (2) ‘I check my bank account every morning on the internet before I go to work.’

每天早上上班前我都会上网查看一下/查一查我的银行账户。

měitiān zǎoshang shàngbān qián wǒ dōu huì shàngwǎng

chákàn yī xià/chá yī chá wǒ de yínháng zhànhù

(lit. every day morning go work before I all will go on net check a time/check a check my bank account)

Once again, the time expressions are positioned at the beginning, with 每天早上 **měitiān zǎoshang** ‘every morning’, which is more general, coming before the more specific 上班前 **shàngbān qián** ‘before I go to work’. They are then followed by 上网 **shàngwǎng** ‘to go on the internet’, a verb phrase that incorporates a location, and 查账 **cházhang** ‘to check the account’, which indicates purpose, is placed at the end.

- (3) ‘Remember to brush your teeth first thing in the morning and last thing at night.’

记住：早上起床后第一件事，晚上睡觉前最后一件事，就是刷牙。

jìzhù | zǎoshang qǐchuáng hòu dìyī jiàn shì | wǎnshang shuìjiào qián zuìhòu yī jiàn shì | jìu shì shuāyá

(lit. remember morning get up after the first mw thing evening go to bed before last one mw thing then is brush teeth)

早上起床后，晚上睡觉前，记得都要刷牙。

zǎoshang qǐchuáng hòu | wǎnshang shuìjiào qián | jìde dōu yào shuāyá

(lit. morning get up after, evening go to bed before, remember must brush teeth)

In both these translations, the two time expressions must be placed consecutively before the main verb phrase 刷牙 **shuāyá** ‘to brush one’s teeth’ to establish the time frame, with the more general time expressions 早上 **zǎoshang** ‘in the morning’ and 晚上 **wǎnshang** ‘in the evening’ being placed before the more specific: 起床后 **qǐchuáng hòu** ‘after getting up’ and 睡觉前 **shuìjiào qián** ‘before going to bed’.

- (4) ‘Where did you go after you had visited Beijing and seen all the sights of the capital?’

你到了北京，看完那儿所有的景色之后，(接着/随后)上哪儿去了？

nǐ dào le běijīng | kàn wán nàr suǒyǒu de jǐngsè zhīhòu | (jiēzhe/suǐhòu) shàng nǎr qù le

(lit. you arrive **le** Beijing, see finish there all sights after (next/afterwards) **cv:to** where go **le?**)

Here, two time clauses, 到北京 **dào běijīng** ‘to get to Beijing’ and 看景色 **kàn jǐngsè** ‘to see the sights’ come first. Optionally, the coverbal phrase 接着 **jiēzhe** or 随后 **suǐhòu** ‘after that’ may be included to emphasize the sequence of the action with regard to the main clause

上别的地方去 *shàng biéde dìfang qù* ‘to go somewhere else’, which follows.

Not only is a subordinate clause of time in English to be moved to the beginning of the sentence in a Chinese translation, but a coordinate clause of time is dealt with in the same way. There are two ways of doing this:

- (5) ‘I was standing waiting at the taxi rank, when a neighbour suddenly came up and offered me a lift home in his car.’

当我正站在的士站等出租汽车的时候，有个邻居突然走上前来/
走过来跟我说，可以用他的车顺路送我回家。

**dāng wǒ zhèng zhàn zài dīshì zhàn děng chūzū qìché de
shíhou | yǒu ge línjū tūrán zǒu shàng qián lái/zǒu guo lái
gēn wǒ shuō | kěyǐ yòng tā de chē shùnlù sòng wǒ huíjiā**
(lit. when I just stand at taxi rank wait hire taxi *de* time, there
was a neighbour suddenly walk forward/over come to me say,
may use his car on the way see me go home)

In this first version, the original coordinate clause of time has been transposed into a subordinate clause of time by moving it to the beginning of the sentence, so that ‘I was standing waiting at the taxi rank, when a neighbour came up’ becomes ‘When I was standing waiting at the taxi rank, a neighbour came up’, etc. An alternative translation could be:

我正站在的士站等出租汽车，就在这时候，突然看见一个邻居
向我走来，他主动提出可以用他的车顺路送我回家。

**wǒ zhèng zhàn zài dīshì zhàn děng chūzū qìché | jiù zài
zhè shíhou | tūrán kànjiàn yī ge línjū xiàng wǒ zǒu lái |
tā zhǔdòng tíchū kěyǐ yòng tā de chē shùnlù sòng wǒ
huíjiā** (lit. I just stand at taxi rank wait hire taxi, just cv:at this
time, suddenly see a neighbor to me walk come, he on own
initiative suggest may use his car on the way see me go home)

In this second version, we have used a coverbal phrase, 就在这时候 *jiù zài zhè shíhou* ‘just at this time’ to translate the single coordinate conjunction ‘when’.

A conditional clause likewise comes at the beginning of the sentence in Chinese:

- (6) ‘It doesn’t matter if it rains.’

下雨也不要紧/也没(有)关系。

xiàyǔ yě bù yàojǐn/yě méi(yǒu) guānxi
(lit. it rains does not matter)

下雨 **xiàyǔ**, a verb phrase, as we have already seen in examples in other sections of the chapter, may often stand alone at the beginning of a sentence in place of a conditional clause, equivalent to 就算下雨的话 **jiùsuàn xiàyǔ de huà** ‘even if it rains’. The sentence if spelt out in full would be: 就算下雨的话, 也不要紧。 **jiùsuàn xiàyǔ de huà | yě bù yàojǐn**.

- (7) ‘Call in to see us this evening on your way back from work, if you have time.’

今晚下班回家的时候, 有时间的话, 顺路到/上我们这儿来坐坐。

**jīnwǎn xiàbān huíjiā de shíhou | yǒu shíjiān de huà |
shùnlù dào/shàng wǒmen zhèr lái zuòzuò**

(lit. this evening finish work go home **de** time, have time **de**
supposition, on way cv:to our here come sit sit)

There are a number of interesting things to note in this Chinese translation. Firstly, the conditional clause is linked with a time clause, which must both come before the main clause. As a time clause in Chinese usually precedes a conditional clause, the time expression 下班的时候 **xiàbān de shíhou** ‘the time you come off work’ comes before the condition clause 有空的话 **yǒu kòng de huà** ‘if you have got time to spare’. Secondly, as we have seen, more general time expressions occur before the more specific and therefore 今晚 **jīnwǎn** precedes the more specific 下班的时候 **xiàbān de shíhou**. In fact 今晚 **jīnwǎn**, which is itself a contraction of the more general 今天 **jīntiān** ‘today’ and the more specific 晚上 **wǎnshang** ‘evening’, is an expression of this precedence. Thirdly, the translation illustrates the Chinese preference for verbal expressions within a logical sequence: 下班 **xiàbān** ‘come off work’, 回家 **huíjiā** ‘go home’, 有时间 **yǒu shíjiān** ‘have time to spare’, 顺路 **shùnlù** ‘on the way’, 到 **dào** ... 来 **lái** ‘come to’, and 坐 **zuò** ‘sit’.

- (8) ‘Contact me by email, if you hear of any developments I ought to know about.’

With this sentence the somewhat complex nature of the conditional clause presents some difficulty for the translator. Chinese syntax is not comfortable with the lengthy attributive in the clause, and a rendering like the following would not sound natural:

听到任何我该知道的事态发展的新情况, 请用电子邮件跟我联系。

**tīngdào rènhé wǒ gāi zhīdao de shìtài fāzhǎn de xīn
qíngkuàng | qǐng yòng diànzǐ yóujiàn gēn wǒ liánxi**

(lit. hear of any I ought to know **de** situation development **de**
new circumstances, please cv:use email cv:with me get in touch)

An alternative approach might be to break the original conditional clause into two: a time clause and a condition clause ('when you hear of any developments' and 'if you think I ought to know'), with the time clause coming first. If we do this, a possible, though somewhat ponderous, version might be:

当你听到任何跟事态发展有关的新情况时，如果你认为我该知道的话，请用电邮和我联系。

dāng nǐ tīngdào rènhe gēn shìtài fāzhǎn yǒuguān de xīn qíngkuàng shí | rúguǒ nǐ rènwéi wǒ gāi zhīdao de huà | qǐng yòng diànyóu hé wǒ liánxi

(lit. when you hear of any with situation development have bearing **de** new circumstances time, if you think I ought to know **de** supposition, please cv:use email cv:with me get in touch)

However, a shorter and more colloquial rendering might be something like:

听到任何事态发展的新情况，如果我该知道的话，请用电邮和我联系。

tīngdào rènhe shìtài fāzhǎn de xīn qíngkuàng | rúguǒ wǒ gāi zhīdao de huà | qǐng yòng diànyóu hé wǒ liánxi

(lit. hear of any situation development **de** new circumstances, if I ought to know **de** supposition, please cv:use email cv:with me get in touch)

- (9) 'We don't mind waiting for you outside the cinema, provided you don't come late and we miss the start of the film.'

只要你不迟到，使大家错过了电影的开头部分，我们可以在电影院外面等你。

zhǐyào nǐ bù chídào | shǐ dàjiā cuòguò le diànyǐng de kāitóu bùfen | wǒmen kěyǐ zài diànyǐngyuàn wàimiàn děng nǐ

(lit. provided you not late arrive, cause all of us miss **le** film **de** opening part, we can cv:at cinema outside wait for you)

The conditional clause is shifted to the front in the Chinese translation as usual. However, note that the conjunction 'and' that introduces the final clause in the original cannot be translated into Chinese. The sentence has to be reformulated to include the causality implied by the English 'and': 'provided you don't come late causing everybody to miss the start of the film'.

An expression that indicates ‘purpose’, like an English infinitive, usually comes after the main verb in Chinese (see example 2 above), but sometimes, when the ‘purpose’ is emphatic, such as ‘in order to, etc.’, it may also come at the beginning.

- (10) ‘To get to her office, you have to go up in the lift to the third floor, and the people behind the desk there will direct you to her room if you ask them.’

到她的办公室去，你得先乘电梯到四层/四楼，再问在那儿的工作人员，他们会告诉你她的办公室在哪儿/上她那儿去该怎么走。

dào tāde bàngōngshì qù | nǐ děi xiān chéng diàntī dào sì céng/sì lóu | zài wèn zài nàr de gōngzuò rényuán | tāmen huì gàosu nǐ tāde bàngōngshì zài nǎr/shàng tā nàr qù gāi zěnmē zǒu

(lit. cv:to her office go, you must first cv:ride lift cv:to fourth floor, and then ask in that place **de** work staff, they can tell you her office cv:is where/cv:to her place go must how go)

The translation also includes the two correlated adverbs 先 *xiān* ‘first’ and 再 *zài* ‘then’ to deal with the clausal conjunction ‘and’ in the original. As a result, ‘you have to go up in the lift to the third floor’ and ‘the people there will direct you to her room’ become ‘you have to go up in the lift to the third floor first’ and ‘then ask the people there, and they will tell you where her office is or how to get there’. Also note that ‘people behind the desk’ has been translated as 那儿的工作人员 *nàr de gōngzuò rényuán* ‘people who work there’. The literal translation 坐在桌子后面的人 *zuò zài zhuōzi hòumiàn de rén*, would sound odd in Chinese.

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nà 那 *that* 2.9, 3.2
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nǎlǐ 哪里 *where* 3.3
nàlǐ 那里 *there* 3.2
nàme 那么 *so, like that* 4.3, 15.1, 16.5,
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 么) ... *if... then* 22.3.3
 rú(guǒ) 如果 *if* 22.3.3
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 ruò 弱 slightly less 2.5.1
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- wàng 望 *hope* 24.3
- wànyī 万一 *in the event of* 22.3.3
- wéi 为 in a judgemental complement 12.1.2
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- wúxū 无须 *need not* 18.1.8
- xī 嘻 as interjection 24.4
- xī 希 *hope* 24.3
- xiǎng 想 *would like, be thinking of* 8.1.6
- xiàng 向 *in the direction of* 14.1
- xiàng 象 *like, as* 15.1
- xíng bù xíng 行不行 *All right?* 23.3
- xìng 姓 *having the surname of*... 15.1
- xīngqī jǐ 星期几 *what day (of the week)* 23.6
- xǔduō 许多 *many* 1.3
- xūyào 需要 *need* 18.1.8
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- yào 要 *about to* 18.1.3
- yào 要 *will soon* 21.1
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if...then... 22.3.3
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- (yào)bùshì (要)不是 *if (it were) not (the case) that* 22.3.3
- yě 也 *also* 1.2.2, 3.4
- yě 也 *also as a clausal conjunctive* 22.2
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- yě 也 *nevertheless* 22.3.5
- yě 也 *still* 22.3.6
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- yī 一 *one* 1.2.2, 30.3.1
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- yī 一 indicating togetherness, swiftness, abruptness etc. 9.4
- yī bùfēn 一部分 *part of* 2.8.1
- yī...jiù...一...就... *as soon as* 14.5, 22.3.7
- yī xìliè 一系列 *a series of* 2.8.1
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- yǐ 以 *so as to* 14.2
 yì 亦 *also* 22.2
 yì 亿 *hundred million* 2.1
 yǐbiàn 以便 *so as to* 22.3.9
 yībiān ... yībiān ... 一边 ...
 一边 ... *while* 14.6
 yīdiǎn(r) 一点儿 *a little* 1.1.2, 1.1.4,
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 yīhuìr 一会儿 *a little while* 7.3
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 yīnwèi ... suǒyǐ ... 因为 ...
 所以 ... *because* ... *therefore* 22.2,
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 yǒude shì 有的是 *there's plenty of*
 15.3
 yǒudiǎn 有点 *a little, a bit* 16.4
 yǒuxiē 有些 *a little, a bit* 16.4
 yóuyú 由于 *because* 22.3.1
 yǔ 与 *and (fml.)* 22.1
 yǔ 予 *to give* 6.3
 yuànyì 愿意 *to be willing* 18.1.7
 yǔqí ... dàobùrú ... 与其 ...
 倒不如 ... *instead of* ...
it's better ... 22.3.8
 yùshì 于是 *thereupon, and so* 22.3.7
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 zài 在 *with location expressions* 8.2
 zāodào 遭到 *in lexical passives* 13.4
 zěnmē 怎么 *how, by what means* 23.6
 zěnmeyàng 怎么样 *how, by what*
means 23.3, 23.6
 zěnmeyàng 怎么样 *as a pro-word* 3.7
 zěnyàng 怎样 *how, by what means*
 23.6
 zérèn 责任 *responsibility* 14.3
 zero connectives 22.5
 zhào 兆 *trillion* 2.1
 zhè 这 *this* 2.9, 3.2
 zhe 着 *as persistent manner indicator*
 20.2, 20.3
 zhe 着 *for disyllabic rhythm* 8.2–4

- zhe** 着 in imperatives 24.2
zhe 着 indicating accompanying manner or circumstances 6.9.3, 14.4–5
zhe 着 indicating continuous existence 6.9.1, 30.1.4
zhe 着 with 在 *zài* to indicate persistent posture or continuous movement 6.9.2
zhèi 这 *this* 2.9, 3.2
zhèlǐ 这里 *here* 3.2
zhēn 真 *really* 24.4
zhèngzài 正在 *just in the process of* 6.8.2
zhèngzài 正在 emphatic alternative to 在 *zài* 20.2
zhèr 这儿 *here* 3.2
zhī 之 qualifying a monosyllabic noun headword 5.1.7
zhǐjiàn 只见 *only see* 25.4
zhǐyào 只要 *only if, provided* 22.3.4
zhǐyǒu 只有 *only when, only if* 16.8
zhǐyǒu ... cái ... 只有 ... 才 ... *only when, only if, only then* 22.2, 22.3.4
zhǒng 种 *type, kind, category* 1.1.4
zhǔnbèi 准备 *to prepare, plan to* 18.1.6
zhǔwèi 猪位 *everyone* 3.7
zǐ 子 as suffix 1
zīgé 资格 *qualifications* 14.3
zìgèr 自个儿 *oneself* 3.7
zìjǐ 自己 *oneself* 3.7
zū 租 *to hire or rent* 6.3
zuì 最 *most* 4.3
zuò 作 in a judgemental complement 12.1.2
zuǒyóu 左右 *more or less* 2.5.1